Little Hands, Big Attitude

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by Burningstars98

Summary

After the destruction of Solaris, pieces of his essence are scattered across time and space... One piece falls into Green Hills, Montana. The Wachowski family takes this newborn in, unaware that it has Mephiles the Dark's memories and thirst for revenge...

...Guess he'll just have to settle for spitting up on Sonic for now.

Chapter 1: First Time?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The darkness was different.

I'd known the dark for a long time, it was even in my name- or at least, my former name. But that was another lifetime ago... Now, I'm not sure what to call myself.

The darkness I'd known for some time now was an empty one; silent, dead, a lack of anything living. It was my fate, left to me in the aftermath of my destruction.
They'd gone back, the blue hedgehog and the princess; they'd gone back to what they presumed to be my beginning... When the being called Solaris was but a simple flame. They blew it out, but when the light was gone- when Iblis had been extinguished... What was left was *me,* the darkness.

I had barely existed in that darkness for what felt like forever, but how long was time when time did not exist in this realm?

But now... Now the darkness was shifting, moving, some of it darker than others. Which could only mean one thing; those darker sections were where the light was being obstructed... which meant there *was* light.
My surroundings were brightening, but also chilling. I felt cold, shivering as it seemed to blow over me. I tried to curl up, but there was something prickly poking at me on all sides.

I was so tired, so weak, but the light pressed in until it seemed that all I had to do... was open my eyes.

The instinct to do that came only a moment later when out of the silence, voices burst through like loudspeakers. My eyelids opened, and I attempted to lift my head to look above me, where the voices were coming from.

There were three humans looming over me, and significantly bigger than I remembered. The same species that locked me away in the first place...

I glanced at each of the humans; two of them were in uniform, which greatly concerned me. Both of them had holsters, one on each side, and each one bearing some sort of weapon.

The third was older, his beard scraggly and face weathered by the sun. Even if he wasn't in uniform or in his prime, he was still armed with a large pitchfork.

I felt my eyes begin to burn, water forming in the crevices as I looked up at my three adversaries. They were here to capture me, I was sure of it.

All of that work, everything I'd done just to be free and complete in my old life, out of that box and that lab where they tortured me night and day. After breaking loose, being trapped in

another cell, getting loose again, and then biding my time to get revenge, only for it to blow up in my face and leave me trapped in a dark void for who knows how long...

...All of that, and I found myself right back where I started, at the mercy of humans and their twisted minds and ambitions.

I was going to be locked up in another box, trapped in another lab where their men of science could "study me" and prod me with sticks. I was never going to see the light of day or hear the roar of the ocean again... and there was nothing I could do about it.

I wanted to run away, but I didn't have the strength- or balance if I was honest with myself. My arms and legs barely responded to my intentions. I was helpless, and so, for the first time that I could remember... I started to cry.

The humans started to speak, probably trying to decide how best to transport me to my new prison. I didn't understand them, they were speaking a language I was not familiar with, but then again, it was hard to understand anything when you were suddenly sobbing and unable to stop yourself.

I had to wonder... Was this how she'd felt? Was this sorrow the same thing I'd put the princess through? But most importantly... Why did I suddenly care?

Then a cloth was draped over me, and I felt myself being lifted up, the cloth tucked up and around me. I clawed at it with my fingers, but my arms were mostly pinned to my chest, the same with my legs.

The human who had me was making soft sounds, and then he pulled me and the cloth closer to him. My head rested against his chest and... I felt the fear beginning to diminish.

Why? They had me, I was trapped and at their mercy; so why did being held like this, his hand resting on the back of my head and stroking my quills, why did it feel so... good?

The soft sounds coming from the human continued as we moved on, leaving the scratchy material I'd been lying in and the retched smell that accompanied it behind. I was carried out of the building and into the dull grayness of the outside. It was even colder out here, and I dug my nose deep into the fabric to keep it from stinging.

The other officer asked a question, and then when it was answered, gave a shrug and then climbed into the driver's seat of a vehicle. My captor took a seat on the opposite side, still holding me close. I tried to get myself free, but there seemed to be no end to this fabric; everywhere my feet and hands felt was this material, enveloping me. Oh well, at least it was warm.

Once the vehicle was on the move, the man holding me pulled out a communication device. He pressed a few buttons on it and then held it up to his ear for a moment. After a moment he then spoke, relaying something to the human on the other end. I wished I understood them and felt as though I should be able to, but I was finding myself quite exhausted by this point, and slowly, the rumbling vibrations of the car lulled me into sleep.

The last thing Tom Wachowski had expected to hear on the emergency line was "I think I found another one of them."

The Sheriff of Green Hills, Montana wasn't sure why he was surprised, really. After all, it had only been a few months since Tails and Knuckles had entered their lives and settled in.

The two of them went right to work fixing the damage Knuckles had made to the house during his initial meeting with Sonic. Tails handled rewiring, Knuckles hauled the lumber, and Sonic was put in charge of the screwdriver and hammer. Within only a few short weeks, it looked almost like nothing had happened.

All of the hard work had been celebrated with ice cream, and a firm scolding from Maddie for the three of them to never destroy the house again.

Sonic had admitted that they couldn't exactly promise that, but Knuckles swore that if there was any damage caused by his actions, he would take on the full responsibility of repair; it was only honorable.

Tom and Wade had been out helping a woman with her groceries when one of the local farmers called and said he'd found another creature like them and to come right away. Tom had a feeling that this newcomer was going to be a challenge to fit; they already had three teenagers in the house, what was he going to do with a fourth?

The farmer was standing outside his barn when they pulled up, pitchfork in hand. "Tom! Boy, am I glad you came so quickly."

"No problem, Sir." Wade announced, "That's what we're here for."

Tom pointed to the barn, "Are they inside?"

The farmer nodded, leading the way in. "I was clearin' out the straw in Bessie's stall when I saw it lyin' over in the corner. I was worried it was a miscarried calf, with how little it is."

Now Tom was confused. Little? Were they younger than he'd thought?

He paused as the farmer opened the door to the stall, and then pointed over to the corner. Tom looked, and his eyes popped wide.

Little wasn't the best word for them, tiny was the best word.

A tiny, black mass of clumped fur and the occasional quill sticking out in a random direction, it was most definitely a hedgehog, but so young Tom was almost certain it had been born yesterday at the earliest.
Little arms and legs shuffled in the straw, their head too heavy for them to lift off the ground. This was no teenager like he'd thought; this was a newborn.

There was no way he or Maddie were going to let them be on their own; they couldn't, this little one couldn't even lift their own head up, they would die!

"Dude... That's the smallest thing I've ever seen." Wade muttered.

The little hedgehog looked up, eyes glistening green much like Sonic's, and then Tom saw its lip begin to quiver.

"Oh no!" Wade apologized as the tiny thing burst into tears, "I-I didn't mean it! You're not that small!"

"It's probably cold and hungry, Wade," Tom muttered, grabbing an old flannel hanging off one of the stalls. "Do you mind-"

"Not at all."

"Thanks... Come here... It's okay..."
He bent down and scooped the infant up, quickly wrapping it up in the fabric to keep it warm. The hedgehog squirmed and squeaked in protest, but quickly began to quiet down the longer it rested against his chest.
"That's it... It's okay..." he whispered.

"You want me to drive you back to your house?" Wade asked.

"Would you? I wanna get them to Maddie."

"Not a problem, Sheriff..."

Tom climbed into the passenger seat, putting a hand on the back of the infant's head. "Just hang in there..." he whispered, and then pulled out his phone. "...Hey, Maddie. Look, I've got a really small patient on their way to you..."

The thud of the vehicle's door closing startled me into wakefulness again. My eyes popped open wide, searching for the danger but only finding the harsh, bright sun.

The human holding me made his own startled sound and within seconds his free hand was covering me, blocking the sun from my view.

I heard another door open, and more footsteps. A woman's voice accompanied them, and then out from under the man's hand, I saw her talking to him and then looking down at me. I tried to get free of the fabric again, but now I had even less energy than before, and all I got was a pitiful kick out of it before I was too tired.

The woman scooped me into her arms just as gently, holding me close just as the man had. She looked down on me, but not in a menacing way, and she said something to me, but once again, I was struggling to understand.

Was it... Was it possible that I had somehow been taken in by humans that didn't wish to hurt me? Was I... safe?

I didn't want to believe it, it was too good of a wish for it to be true. Humans didn't care about beings like us, they only cared about "scientific progress."

She carried me into the house we'd arrived at, the cool air blowing on me and sending shivers through my body.

There came several rapid footsteps from somewhere else in the building, getting louder as they approached.

The voice was young and impatient, probably one of their children.
The woman bent down slowly, and then hands pulled the fabric back. I turned my head in the direction of the excited giggles...

...and was met with the familiar, green eyes of a speedy, blue hedgehog.

Chapter End Notes

I see Mephiles like Chaos in a way; he's an immensely powerful being that was hurt and tortured by those that had once respected and even worshipped him. When finally freed from their cages, both of them set out to destroy the lives of those they deemed responsible for their pain- in a way he was like Shadow as well- but Mephiles didn't have friends to talk him down and remind him that there was good in the world like Chaos had Tikal and Shadow had Maria.

He was finally free of the scientists' bonds and the first thing that happens is Shadow locks him up again, this time in the scepter. He's once again trapped, and while I don't know if Shadow would have seen his plight as a kindred spirit, he didn't even give Mephiles a chance to talk, because he'd encountered a Mephiles in the present that was evil and assumed he was always that way and perhaps caused this vengeful spirit by going back in time and sealing Mephiles away in the first place.
"The person you met in the present is evil because you went back in time and attacked him, creating this evil in him."

Ahh... Time travel, love it.

So that is where this personality is coming from; he was a being that just wanted to be free and left alone and came to believe that in order to be free, he'd have to destroy those that kept locking him away.

Chapter 2: We Have a Guest!

Sonic had been flying down the stairs from the attic the second Donut Lord and Wade had pulled up into the driveway. Old habits die hard and he happened to be engaging in one particular habit when the phone had rung: Eavesdropping.

He had heard his dad say something about finding a baby at the farm- A hedgehog baby, just like him.

To say he was excited to meet this new member of the household was an understatement. He managed to keep his excitement contained, but not enough that Tails and Knuckles didn't notice and wonder what secrets he'd pilfered.

The fifteen minutes that passed were the longest fifteen minutes in Sonic's life- or at least that's how he felt.

Finally, the car pulled up and Wade climbed out of the driver's seat, and after a moment, Tom climbed out of the passenger seat, his flannel jacket bundled up in one arm.

Sonic rushed down the stairs to the hallway, looking as his mom took the bundle from her husband, both looking down at what was wrapped in it.

He came up, bouncing up and down on his toes. "Can I see? Can I see?"

His mom grinned, "Alright, but be gentle..."

He reached up and tugged the fabric back just a bit, his eyes lighting up.

The little hedgehog was absolutely tiny, almost small enough to fit in his hand. Sleek, black fur with small, powder blue flecks and the brightest green eyes like his own. The baby looked just as surprised to see Sonic, eyes wide and toothless mouth open.

"Oh my gosh...!" He cooed, "Look at him...!"

He wanted to hold him, but he restrained himself. He needed to be patient.

"What is it, Sonic?"
The hedgehog looked as his two brothers came downstairs after him, and then they also saw the baby. Tails gasped and then crept up as well, "Aww...!"

Knuckles wasn't usually one to drop his tough-guy act, especially around his family, but even he seemed absorbed into the tiny guest's presence. "He is quite small..."

"Yeah, and young!" Tails surmised, "I don't think he's much older than a few days!"

Maddie stood up straight again as the baby fussed, walking towards the kitchen. "I have some formula that we usually use for abandoned kittens and puppies. Let's hope he takes it, he's probably starving."

She held the baby in one arm while preparing the tiny bottle with the other, occasionally asking Sonic to hold something still while she scooped out some of the formula or twisted the top onto the bottle. After a moment of shaking, she held the nipple out towards the baby's mouth.

The baby seemed to be having some trouble figuring out how to latch onto the bottle and how to suck the formula through the nipple, but once he did, it was for dear life.

"Goodness...!" Maddie giggled as the baby slurped down the formula. "You *were* hungry!"

Tom entered the kitchen and gave a smirk, "Looks like we've got another little furry guest in the house..." He murmured.

"Can we keep him?" Sonic begged, "Can I name him?"

"Hey, why do you get to name him?" Tails complained.

"Because I was here first! Seniority rules!"

"But I am older than you," Knuckles reminded, "Wouldn't that mean *I* get to choose the name?"

"What? No way!"

"We'll worry about naming him once we've figured out where he came from and if he's staying with us." Tom reminded, "I like to hope that his mom is out there somewhere looking for him."

"Right," Maddie agreed, "The last thing we want to do is keep this little guy from his mommy..."

The baby looked up at Maddie with wide eyes, his little clawed hands scraping at the plastic bottle. Maddie gave a smile but hoped she herself wouldn't form a bond with him... It would make it even harder to let him go.

"Can I help you pick out stuff for him, then?" Sonic begged, "Please please please-"

Tom patted the hedgehog on the head, "Slow down there, Sonic. He's only been here five minutes."

"You say that about everything, Dad!"

"This isn't something we can just rush into, Sonic. Taking care of a newborn baby is a lot more work than it is to take care of you, Tails, and Knuckles. He can't do all of the stuff to take care of himself like you can."

"You wanted me to be more responsible, remember? I can totally prove my responsible-ness by helping with the baby!"

"Yes, and responsibility also means being patient and waiting for the adults to make a decision, especially on something as big as this."

Knuckles stepped forward, putting a hand on the hedgehog's shoulder. "Our father figure is correct... A warrior must wait for the right moment to strike, or else put others at risk, even if they think their moment is now."

Sonic groaned but didn't argue further. He walked back over to his mom, peeking over at the baby. "Don't worry, you'll be safe with us. We won't let anything happen to you..."

Eating was not something I was used to. I had been an immortal god of Time, a being of pure energy that did not need food, and the lack of a mouth in my split form, well... That complicated things.

When the woman had held out the bottle to me, I wasn't sure if I even needed it, much less how to drink from it... But this new form must have also come with new instincts because as soon as it touched my lips, I was latched on like a leech.

This seemed to please the woman, as she smiled as I sucked down the substance. It had an odd taste, but I didn't care.
The officer came around, saying something to his wife. I then heard Sonic and his two friends arguing about something.

I was still trying to wrap my head around that. My initial look at the hedgehog had been brief, but enough for me to see he was a little different than the one I'd previously... *Encountered.*

For one, he was younger, at least by comparison. His voice was that of a child, his mannerisms youthful and innocent. If he had seen battles like the other Sonic had, it wasn't as frequent or as intense. His friends also seemed younger, though not by quite as much.

As the man also joined in the argument and it shifted from between the three children to between the man and Sonic, I saw a lot of hand motions towards me; they must be discussing how long I would be there.
Why couldn't I understand them? I knew hundreds of languages and dialects from being immortal and experiencing all of time; I had watched languages adapt and change, some even be conquered and practically wiped out by invading forces. I couldn't even determine the general area from which this language had originated.

Then it occurred to me; perhaps this wasn't a matter of it being a new language, but rather that this new form had erased my knowledge of an existing one. The scientists at the lab had mentioned grooves in the brain that deepened as they grew older and learned new things; was this what had happened? Had these grooves in my own mind been erased when I was placed in a younger, less developed body?

I would have to relearn everything; I only had my own memories of my own experiences to suggest I was ever someone before now.

My attention was caught by Sonic once more as the hedgehog approached. He looked at me, our eyes locking on one another. He murmured something to me, but even if I didn't understand the words coming from his mouth, his expression told me a lot. He was trying to reassure me... and then he took my hand in his own and squeezed it gently with a smile.

He didn't hate me... He liked me at least... I supposed there were worse places to hide for now, at least until I could figure this place out.

Tom knew that they had everything they were going to need for the first night, but they'd run out of formula eventually and there were other things they would need to buy for the next few days.

He sat down at the table, a pencil and paper in hand to make a list. Tails came up to him on one side, and Sonic on the other to watch. "Okay, I'm making a list of what we need to get for the baby from the store- among other groceries. Any ideas, boys?"

Tails began naming things off while counting on his fingers. "Okay. We'll need a bed, a blanket, milk, socks-"

"Ugh, all of that stuff is so boring... we know he needs that stuff!" Sonic whined, "Hey Donut Lord, why don't we get a racecar bed for him just like mine? Ooh! And toys! I can find him some toys!"

"Ease up there, Speedy. We need to be methodical about this... Now Tails is right, we need a blanket and small socks to keep his feet warm. I don't know if we'll be able to find little gloves his size just yet, but we also need diapers."

"Diapers?" Tails asked.

"Yeah," Sonic explained, "Humans have these little cloth pieces that go on the baby's bottom to catch their poop and pee."

"Eww!"

Tom gave a smirk, "Lemme guess, you guys were just carried outside to go in the yard by your parental figures?" The hedgehog and fox gave nods, "Well, around here, we use diapers so we don't have to always be on guard for any possible time the baby poops or pees on the floor. So," he scribbled down on the paper, "diapers..."

"Okay... Bottles." Sonic named off, "We'll need more than one so we always have a clean one handy. And a racecar bed-"

"We'll worry about an actual bed later, Sonic. We've already got a cradle for the time being."

"We do?"

"Uh-huh!" Tom announced proudly, "It was *my* old cradle, and it's been safely packed away for me and Maddie's first kid. Of course, *you* were too *big* for it by the time you actually

moved in with us."

"We're gonna use *your* baby bed? It's ancient by now! Probably half-eaten by termites!"

The man frowned, "I wouldn't consider it ancient..."

"I agree with Tom Wachowski..."
They turned to Knuckles as he walked up to the table, "If this infant is to be a part of our family, it is only right that one of his first gifts from us is a Wachowski heirloom."

"Well said, Knuckles," Maddie answered from the living room. The baby had finished off his bottle and then gone to sleep now, closely snuggled against her arm.

"Gee... Babies sure do sleep a lot." Tails murmured.

"Well, all that looking around, seeing new things, and eating takes a lot out of you when you're that size... Now come on, give me more things for the list..."

The list was compiled eventually, and then Tom offered to take Tails and Sonic with him to the store. Knuckles insisted on remaining home to assist Maddie with anything she needed since she'd be spending most of the time tending to the baby. Sonic was jealous at first that Knuckles got to stay home with the baby, but was convinced when Tom told him and Tails that each of them could pick *one* toy out for him.

The trio piled into the truck and rolled off into town, leaving Maddie alone in a mostly-quiet house.

Maddie leaned back on the couch, looking down at the tiny hedgehog in her arms that barely weighed anything. Were they always this light, or was he underweight for his age? How old even was he? How did he wind up all alone in a barn stall, shivering in the cold?

She shifted just a bit against the armrest, getting her right arm free. She gently ran one finger over his fur and quills on his head, feeling its soft, silky texture. The baby's nose twitched in his sleep, his little claws kneading into the fabric of the borrowed flannel.

"How did this happen...?" She breathed, "...How did I get four babies in my house in the span of a year...?"

Sonic had adopted them long before they returned the favor, though she wasn't exactly sure how long he'd been spying on them. Sonic didn't talk much about his life before that fateful day Tom tranquilized him in the garage, only that he had been sent to Earth to protect him when he was 'younger' and for whatever reason, he'd chosen her and Tom to be his new family, even if they didn't know he was there.

What he'd been sent away to protect him from had been a mystery until Tails and Knuckles arrived, and they weren't even home for that bit. Tails never mentioned his parents, and Knuckles only spoke of his father, who'd been lost to the war between his tribe and the tribe of Sonic's former Guardian, Longclaw.

Two young boys found themselves pit against each other by the grudges of their ancestors, but in the end, forming a friendship that was manifested into something stronger; a brotherhood between them and Tails.

Knuckles had been alone, perhaps afraid to form bonds with others for a long time, afraid that if he got close to someone, they too would be taken from him. Sonic had tried to make friends while following Longclaw's instruction to never stop running and to stay hidden, but a friend that doesn't know you exist is no real friend at all.

Maddie looked back down at the baby; he would have no prior grudges, no troubled past of bullying and war. He could grow up in a loving home, and with loving parents and siblings...

Maddie chuckled a little, "...So much for not getting attached."

Chapter 3: The Christening of an Older Sibling

"How come Tails gets to walk and I have to sit in the cart?"

It seemed like a fair question to the blue hedgehog, especially since most of the toddlers in the store were able to walk.

"Someone needs to make sure the groceries don't get stolen, Sonic," Tom replied.

"What kind of person would steal from the sheriff? What kind of person here in Green Hills would steal *period!?*"

The man grinned at the hedgehog's complaint, "Fine," he admitted as he checked the condition of the eggs in a carton. "You're in the cart because you have a hard time *not touching things.*"

"I can... Not touch things." Sonic pouted.

"Mmmhmm... And that's how we wind up with six cans of chili on the conveyor belt when *I* only put *one* can in the basket."

"We might run out if you don't stock up!"

"Sure. Hold the eggs."

Sonic took the carton from his dad and then looked at Tails. "What do you think we should call him?"

"Who? The baby?" Tails shrugged, "I don't know. I can name my inventions, but I name them according to their *function.* A person is... Different."

Tom hummed in agreement, "I'd say that your names come from your abilities, like how Sonic is fast and Knuckles, well... Uses his knuckles." He pointed to the little fox, "But then *your* real name is Miles, which is a more *human* name, so your kind's naming principles are a little lost on me."

Tails shrugged, "The grownups in my village never really told us where our names came from."

Sonic frowned a bit at his little brother's statement. He remembered the conversation that had occurred a few days after they'd defeated Dr. Eggman a second time...

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The government was still in town at that point, cleaning up the giant robot the villain had made with pieces of their own equipment and then some, all with the wave of a hand. It made Sonic shudder to remember the power and madness that had come with his grasp of The Master Emerald; he was even madder than he was before, and Sonic had almost lost his life

just trying to keep him distracted.
His parents had rushed in and snatched him out of danger just in time, and then they all almost died being crushed... If not for what had happened next.

The Chaos Emeralds, the seven stones within The Master Emerald, had chosen to spare them by letting Sonic use their power. Sonic remembered grasping his parents' hands and preparing to die with them, and then a rush of energy and warmth rushed through him. He barely remembered actually getting up and shoving back against the robot's approaching foot, the rush had left him with only the instinct. When his mind cleared, he was plowing through the robot's foot like a torpedo and flying upward into the air. He still couldn't believe he'd flown!

But if Eggman's rampage and then his own blinding rush had taught him anything, it was that this was a lot of power for any one person- human or hedgehog- to wield, and he just wasn't ready for the responsibility of keeping it. He'd let it go, the emeralds flying off to who knows where.

Even though the energy had healed his wounds, Maddie had still insisted on a check-up for him, Tails, and Knuckles; after all, even if his cuts and bruises were gone, he'd had unfamiliar energy running through him like a lightning bolt, who knew what kind of effects it left behind?

"I'm fine, Maddie, really!" Sonic complained, trying to push her away but remaining seated on the table of her office.

"I'm almost done, Sonic. Just a few more minutes." Maddie's tone was firm, but understanding. "I know it's agony for you to stay still this long, but please..."

Tails was sitting in a chair, watching while picking small pieces of debris out of his gloves. He'd been out for a while back at the hotel in Hawaii, and then his head had taken another hit when he and Knuckles were thrown out of the crashing robot and onto the ground. He'd recovered from that second fall much faster, but Maddie had told him after his own check-up that he still had a concussion from before.

"Ugh..." Sonic slouched in place, wincing a bit as Maddie stuck a medical instrument into his ear. "Ah! That's cold!"

"Sorry."
She definitely didn't sound like it.
"I'll get you finished, and then check Knuckles real quick, and we can all go on our ways, whatever that is."

"What do you mean?"
Sonic tilted her head, "Aren't we all going back to the house?"

Tails and Knuckles stood up a little straighter, looking to each other and then back to the Wachowskis.

Sonic looked to his parental figures firmly, "You're not kicking Knuckles and Tails out, are you?"

Tom looked to the others, "That's not what we meant-"

"I understand your decision." Knuckles interrupted with a solemn nod, "I caused significant damage to your home-"

"So did I!" Sonic argued, "Tom told me not to jump on that drone Eggman brought with him, and I didn't listen, but you guys-"

"Hey. Stop for a second."
Tom grasped Sonic's shoulders, "We never said that we were kicking them out, okay? Maddie just meant that if they wanted to go back home to your planet, then that was okay too. That's all."

Sonic's outraged look faded a bit, his shoulders slumping and his frown disappearing.
"...Oh."

Knuckles looked to Tails, "What of you, Fox? Are you going to return to your village?"

Tails was quiet, tugging on his gloves a little more. His tails curled up under the chair, "I... I'd like to stay here... If that's okay."

Tom gave a light smirk, and then walked over to the fox and bent down to his eye level.
"...You don't have any parents back home either, huh...?"

Tails didn't make eye contact, "...No... Just the grownups."

Sonic remembered Tails saying that everyone in his village thought his two tails were weird; did that include the adults? Knuckles and Sonic had both lost their villages, but Tails had a village where nobody cared about him.
"Of course, you can stay!" Sonic informed, relieved when the fox perked up. "Both of you can! And if that government guy has a problem with it-"

Tom chuckled, gently giving Sonic a noogie. "He'll have to get through us first..."

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"Sonic?"

Sonic snapped out of his thoughts and saw they'd moved on in the grocery store. "Huh?"

Tom smirked, "I said you could get out and look for a toy for the baby now. Get lost in a chilidog daydream?"

Sonic blew the man off, hopping out of the cart and jogging at a human's pace over to the toy section. "As if, Donut Lord!"

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When my eyes had closed, I was settled in the woman's arms, and when I woke up again, I was alone... Or at least, I thought I was, at first. I was lying on my back, something soft underneath me, probably a blanket. Over me was a ceiling fan, the blades making slow, lazy circles; it was just enough to stir the air, and the singular bulb in the socket flickered slightly.

Why did this tiny body need to sleep so much? It made it impossible to keep my bearings. I would go to sleep in one place and wake up in another, with no memory of how I got there.

I listened closely, but it was strangely quiet. Where had the hedgehog and the humans gone? It was nice to not have their constant, unrecognizable vocals in my ears, but I was suspicious as to why they had suddenly left me all alone after all that fuss.

I tried to look around as well, but this body's movement was still very erratic; my arms and legs moved when I didn't want them to, and when I tried to move on my own, they went limp. It was quite frustrating.

But as I shifted about randomly, the ground beneath me suddenly shuddered. It wobbled and shifted, and then the face of a massive beast appeared in my vision. Its head was so big it could potentially swallow me whole, long, thick fur hung down over me, and its breathing roared in my ears.

I was underneath it slightly, and it appeared to be looking away. Had it noticed me? I needed to be still and quiet to avoid detection, but this uncontrollable body would not cooperate. Its head bent down, and its cold, wet nose brushed against my fur as it sniffed me. What do I do? What do I-

Then there was a startled sound, and I was scooped up and away from the beast. I looked up and found myself in the arms of the echidna, who was stepping back from the beast and murmuring something to it. He then looked down at me, and just...stared at me for several seconds.

What? I wanted to say, *What do you want?*

But something else came out of my mouth instead. It had felt like a cough, but when I did cough, something from my stomach rose up and tumbled out of my mouth and onto the echidna's chest fur. He looked utterly disgusted, and I might have felt the same way; but honestly, I somehow felt much better, despite not having really noticed I was feeling bad in the first place.

He held me out from him, looking down at the little chunks sticking to his fur and then hollered something out of the room we were in. The woman was there within seconds, trading the echidna a towel for me. Though the echidna was quite irritated, the woman was laughing, holding me out, and cooing something to me.

This woman had four mobians in her home, one of which was Sonic the Hedgehog, and one of which wasn't even able to move on their own and who had just thrown up on one of the other three. She also had some sort of beast wandering the halls of her home, and yet, she was smiling and laughing like it was nothing...

...Nothing fazed this woman, did it?

"*Ozzie!*"

Knuckles knew that Maddie had set the baby down to sleep on her bed, and left the door open just a crack in case he cried. Knuckles chose to stand guard over the room if only to make sure that someone was there if his cry was too quiet for the woman to hear.

He'd left the doorway for *maybe* thirty seconds to use the restroom; a baby hedgehog barely bigger than his fist, set in the middle of a queen-sized bed? What were the chances he'd roll off while Knuckles was gone...?

He hadn't thought about Ozzie. He probably *should have*; he'd seen Ozzie hop up on their bed randomly to sleep many times since he'd arrived, there wasn't *usually* a *baby* there.

Ozzie had noticed the newcomer though, and when Knuckles saw him, he was sticking his nose down onto the baby to sniff him.

The echidna moved quickly, rushing forward and scooping the baby up into his arms. He hadn't meant to yell at the dog, and he tried to mend the situation by patting Ozzie on the head before backing up. "My apologies. You are a *'good boy,'* I promise..."

Once he felt that the apology had been properly dispensed, he went about checking the baby for any injuries. He didn't look hurt, but perhaps a bit frightened, staring back at him with wide eyes-

"Gyah-!"
Knuckles yelped and pulled the baby back away from him as a stream of white fluid came flying out of his mouth, splashing on the echidna's chest fur. "...*Wonderful.* Uh, Maddie? The infant just *vomited* on me!"

Maddie came running a moment later, a small towel in her hand. "Ha! Congratulations, you've been christened!" She announced, taking the baby and wiping off his face before handing the towel to Knuckles. "Don't worry, they just do that sometimes..."

"He has not fallen ill?"

"No," Maddie ran a finger over the infant's quills as he just stared at her. "Babies just spit up from time to time... Hi... Do you feel better now, Sweetie...?"

Knuckles wiped the vomit from his chest, watching their interactions closely, "I do believe he *likes* you."

"Yeah... I think he does too."

Chapter 4: The First Night

By dinner, things had begun to settle down a bit in the Wachowski household. Tom had recruited Knuckles to assist him in bringing the cradle into the house from where it was stored, and it was set up at the foot of Maddie and Tom's bed.

While that was being done, Maddie created a *'Midnight Box'* to keep in their room. Inside the box, she placed everything she thought they might need to tend to the baby in the middle of the night: a bottle and container of formula, spare diapers and wipes, burp rags and even a spare onesie. With his incredibly small size, the items they'd bought for him were mostly baby doll clothes, and even the preemie-sized diapers were big on him, and Maddie had to cut out tiny little holes in them for his tail.

Sonic had insisted on helping Maddie put one of the diapers on him; he was determined to prove how responsible he was so that they would trust him to take care of the baby on his own.

Maddie was pleased he wanted to help so much, even if she wasn't quite convinced. She was still quite proud of Knuckles for how calm he'd stayed when the baby had puked on him; not many new big siblings were so desensitized to such things.

Tails had been the first to offer his toy of choice to the newcomer; a soft blanket with a plush duck at one end and satin ribbons making the border of the blanket itself. He thought that the baby could use a buddy to sleep with; Tails needed that sometimes when he had a nightmare, and Sonic was always willing to scoot over in the bed and provide that comfort.
The baby had latched onto the blanket as soon as it was handed to him, his fingers curling around the duck's wing and squeezing it. So far they hadn't gotten him to smile, but Tails was determined to get there.

Sonic's gift was a ring of rubbery plastic that not only gave the baby something to practice gripping but also would serve as a good teething toy later on when he actually *got* teeth.

As Maddie set the plates of food on the table, Sonic and Tails were both sitting in the living room on the floor, just watching the baby as he squirmed on the floor.

"I could watch him for hours..." Sonic cooed.

"You *have* been, Hedgehog." Knuckles mumbled, his attention more on the book he was reading.

"You enjoying your book, Knuckles?" Tails asked curiously.

"It is... Most intriguing." Knuckles looked up from the pages, "The wizard has just arrived at the hobbit's home. He does not seem pleased to have all of the dwarves invading his home."

"Gee, I know how he *feels*." Tom hollered from the kitchen, "He lived a perfectly normal life until *they* showed up."

Sonic smirked, "Are you implying that you didn't enjoy me showing up in your garage, Donut Lord?"

"My life would be far less *interesting* if you *hadn't*."

"See? You need me more than you think!"

"Alright, dinnertime!" Maddie alerted, "Come and eat while it's crisp."

"Yes! Taco salad!" Tails cheered as he got up from the floor.

"Come, Hedgehog." Knuckles summoned as he too got up from his place, "The infant will not go anywhere while we eat."

Sonic looked at their little guest for a moment longer and then grumbled as his dad made a motion to come as well. "Ugh... *Fine*...!"
He wandered from the living room and over to the table but kept an ear open for the baby fussing.

"You need more than just one leaf of lettuce on your plate, Sonic." Maddie argued, putting a large clump of greens on the hedgehog's plate. "It's good for you."

"The meat's good for me *too*!"

"Look to the food tapestry!" Knuckles gestured to the poster stuck to the pantry door, showing the food pyramid. "The block of plants is *clearly* larger than that of the fish and other meats."

"Yeah..." Sonic picked at the lettuce pile with his fork, "...Which makes it more of a pain..."

"I heard that, Mister." Maddie warned with a mild glare, "Tails isn't complaining."

"Tails *likes* the green stuff!"

Knuckles huffed, "I am still uncertain about the *'Guac,'* as you call it. In my time alone, it became quite clear that if you encounter a pile of lumpy, green substance, you do not even *touch* it, much less *consume* it."

Tom gave a snort, "That's a fair assessment for most things, yes."

Sonic looked back towards the living room, but the baby hadn't made a sound. He started to move back towards the door, but Maddie caught him. "But-"

"Sonic, if the baby needs something, he'll let us know. Leave him be."

"...Fine..."

Finally, some time to myself to properly think.

The man, Sonic, and the fox all returned shortly after my encounter with the beast, the many bags they brought in suggesting they'd gone to the market. Sonic was back on me almost immediately, and I was finding the constant cooing and tapping of his finger on my nose to be quite irritating at this point. Why did he feel so insistent on being around me at all times?

At least the others had gotten the message that I needed space. The humans focused on getting things ready for me to stay that night, I guessed; the man and echidna had passed by with a large, wooden item, a cradle from the looks of it, and the woman had been putting infant items in a box and then going into the bedroom.

The echidna had settled with a large book, and the fox, while still on the floor with me, was at least occupying himself with a tool of some sort.

But Sonic? Sonic refused to take his eyes off of me.

A small part of me worried that somehow, this Sonic *knew*; he knew who I really was and was afraid to let me out of his sight, but logic stepped in. He couldn't possibly know, after all, if he did, he wouldn't be this happy to see me.

Just the same, he didn't want to leave my side. When the woman had placed some sort of covering on my lower end, he had even begged her to help. What was he trying to accomplish here? If he thought that constantly being in my face was going to make me like him more, then he was wrong.
Afterward, he kept making faces and noises at me, and it had taken me a few times of this to realize what he was doing; he was trying to get me to smile, to laugh.

The problem was that- like many things in this tiny, underdeveloped body- I didn't know *how*. I remembered being able to walk, talk, and move on my own, but the muscle memory of how I did such things was lost. Even if he did somehow manage to amuse me with his antics, I wasn't showing it.

Perhaps that was how the others managed to convince him to leave me alone on the floor once more. They all walked off, their voices fading into the background as I lay with my new blanket in my grasp. The fox had picked it out for me during their trip, or at least he'd been the one to give it to me...

... I couldn't remember the last time someone had *given* me something instead of taking it from me. No, that was false. I *did* remember the last time... It was a long time ago when the people of Soleanna still treated me with respect.

That was how humans were; they treated you nicely to lull you into a false sense of peace and calm, and once you trusted them, they used you for their own ends.

That was it. This was all a trap, a trap to try and get me to trust them.

I wasn't going to be fooled this time, no. They considered me an infant and thus didn't expect me to behave as responsible as they were- No... They didn't expect me to behave at all... So I *wouldn't.* I was going to make their lives miserable, I was going to be the most poorly-

behaved infant they'd ever seen!

The tranquility only lasted so long. Maddie and Tom knew it was coming, but Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles had thought the peace would continue.

Bedtime routine had been gone as usual; brushing teeth, putting on clean gloves and socks, and then thirty minutes of quiet time before lights out.

Knuckles continued to read his wizard book, Tails sat in the corner working on a new invention he swore would improve the speed of the dishwasher, and Sonic sat at his desk, scribbling new constellations onto his star map in a white crayon.

The stars was something he'd found not only interesting, but helpful. Before he'd learned how to read clocks and calendars, he used the moon and stars to keep track of the time, but mostly when the sun would rise and he would have to duck back into his cave to hide from early morning traffic.

He'd learned the constellations and their lore later when he could read, but by then, he'd also made up some of his own. Some of them were different star combinations altogether, but some of them, he'd also seen a similar shape to the ancient humans. The group of stars that the humans called Orion the Hunter, Sonic had designated as The Echidna Warrior; and the constellation Pisces- rather than seeing two fish- he saw the wings of a bird, and he had called it the Longclaw constellation.

It was a way to always remember her by, and so he scribbled the new name under the old one on the map.

It was almost time to put everything away and retreat to his bed, when a sound came from downstairs that caught his attention; the baby was suddenly screaming. "Huh?"

"Do not go to investigate, Hedgehog." Knuckles warned, stopping the hedgehog in mid-step. "Tom and Maddie are both downstairs to tend to him."

"But-"

"Give him a few minutes, Sonic." Tails agreed, "You know Maddie doesn't want us going back downstairs after lights out unless we need to use the bathroom."

"Or it's an emergency!"

"Which we don't know if it is yet." Tails patted the hedgehog's bed, "Let the grownups handle it."

Sonic wasn't pleased with this, but he supposed the fox was right; if it wasn't an emergency, he really didn't want to face his mom's wrath. He sulked back to his bed and sat down on it, but didn't get under the covers; he wasn't going to get fully settled until the baby stopped crying and they had the all-clear.

The crying and screaming persisted for another half-hour. It faded in and out, probably from him being taken from place to place, passing under the attic stairs as they went.
Sonic had been sitting on the bed, practically vibrating as he tried not to rush down there and help; but finally, he'd had enough. "I gotta go see what's going on."

He turned to see Tails had somehow successfully gone to sleep, his tails curled around himself in the beanbag chair. Eventually, he would outgrow his favorite napping place.
He looked to Knuckles, who was also still awake from the crying and had simply resumed his reading, and pointed to the fox. "How is he doing that...?"

Knuckles shrugged, "Perhaps the fox's village was still loud and active at this hour."

Sonic frowned, and then got up. He knew he couldn't open the attic steps; he had no clue if either of his parents or Ozzie were standing directly underneath and if he hit them in the head with the steps, that would be the last thing he ever did.
But he did have a secondary exit from the attic.

"Hedgehog, where are you going...?" Knuckles warned as Sonic grabbed onto the punching bag.

Sonic hauled himself up on top of the punching bag and then grabbed onto a rafter to swing over to the skylight, directly over where Tails slept. "I'm going to find out what's going on, this has been going for thirty minutes!" He hissed.

Knuckles gave him a mild glare, and then went back to his book. "Do not get me involved when Maddie catches you..."

Sonic rolled his eyes and then climbed out the skylight and out onto the roof; dang, he could still hear it up here. He crawled over to the side of the roof and dropped down onto the next part of the roof, and then down to the deck. The back door was usually unlocked, if anything so Sonic didn't need that half of a second to get it unlocked before running out if he was attacked again.

It scared Sonic a little bit how much thought was put into the renovations, primarily the thought of how best to make it easy for him to run away from another attack; sliding porch doors that moved through their tracks quickly, windows that when unlocked simply swung open instead of being lifted. It was all so he could bail out without wasting time, and it hurt his heart to see how frightened his parents had gotten when they saw how severe the initial attack on their home had been.

Sonic shoved the thought out of his head, pulling the door open and reentering the house. The wailing continued, and he followed the sound to the kitchen. "Mom?"

His mom was standing by the pantry, bouncing back and forth with the baby in her arms as he screamed bloody murder. He hadn't realized just how loud he was being until he was in the room, how was she not deaf already?

Maddie looked to him and gave a sigh, "I should've known it was only a matter of time before you came down." She murmured, though loud enough for him to hear her over the

screams. "He started up about as soon as we put him in the cradle."

Sonic covered his ears, "Why?"

"Who knows? Sometimes babies just cry and you don't know why. He's got a dry diaper..." She gestured to a bottle on the counter, "He didn't want the bottle... I think he's just tired and cranky after everything today."

Sonic wished there was something he could do. What was something Longclaw did to help him sleep when he was little? It seemed so long ago, it was hard to remember... But he did remember one thing she'd do to at least calm him down when he was upset.
"Can I try something?"

Maddie shrugged, and then followed Sonic as he went to the couch and sat down. She carefully handed the baby off to him, and Sonic moved the baby to where his head was resting on Sonic's arm, leaving his other arm free. He then took two fingers and pressed them between the baby's back quills, about where his shoulder blades were. He then gently moved the fingers in a circular motion, massaging the infant's back.

The baby continued to scream, but only for a minute or so. Little by little, the screams were broken up by soft whimpers and whines, longer and longer as time went on. Maddie told him he probably had been screaming for so long it was hard to stop.

Sonic knew what that was like; he hadn't ever told anyone about it, but the first few nights he'd been on Earth, he'd gone to a place in the woods where nobody could hear, and had screamed and sobbed to the night sky until his throat hurt and he lost his voice for most of the next day. He would try, but the sorrow in his heart, the pain in his chest was too great; he couldn't take the pain, not for a while.
Some nights that ache would come back, and he would muffle his cries into his pillows.

He thought about this baby, lost even younger than he'd been. How had he wound up all alone in the barn? Where was his mom? What happened to her?

After several minutes, the baby was quiet, his breathing slow; he'd fallen asleep, limp in Sonic's arms with his head resting on Sonic's shoulder. In those long nights, Sonic wished he'd had someone to snuggle with.

Maddie had sat and watched his efforts, and she was smiling as she looked back at him.
"Look at you... Hedgehog intuition?" she whispered.

Sonic smiled back, looking down to the baby. "...Big brother intuition..."

Chapter 5: Monday Mornings

My initial plan hadn't quite gone as I'd expected.

Screaming as loud and as hard as I could manage had worked for a time, but then I found that it *hurt.* It hurt my new lungs and throat with the constant gasps and volume, but by that time, I couldn't stop myself. I was genuinely in distress now, and that was when the tears had spilled.

The woman had walked back and forth with me, bouncing me, trying to get me to calm down, but what luck was she going to have when even *I* couldn't calm myself? She tried feeding me again, but I made it clear that it was not what I wanted. I didn't quite know what I wanted, but it wasn't for them to have a good night's sleep.

It went on for a while, and then Sonic was there. I presumed the sound had irritated him to the point of him coming to find out what was causing it, so my plan sort of worked in that regard; I kept him from sleeping.

He exchanged words with the woman and then she followed him into the living area. He sat down on the couch and then she handed me to him. I didn't *want* to be held, especially not by *him!* But then he pressed his fingers into my back, putting gentle pressure and rubbing them in circles. I didn't know what he was doing, but... It felt *good.*

I still fought to keep it up, but exhaustion won over in the end; this body got worn out too easily, and far too quickly. Every breath was still a cry or whine, at least until I slumped back into the darkness of sleep.

So far my quest for petty revenge was not going so well.

The following day was different. When I woke up, it was still early; the sun wasn't yet up, but the humans were both pulling back the blanket with irritated groans. If they didn't want to get up, why were they? It was still dark.

The man was the first to actually get out of the bed, yawning and then opening the door. The beast was lying right there by the door, awaiting their exit. Its tail wagged back and forth and then led the way away from the room.

A small light, probably a lamp, then lit up the room in a gentle glow. I thought about making a fuss again, but my throat hurt from the night before. Instead, I just sat quietly until the woman came around her side of the bed and leaned down over me. She cooed something to me and then picked me up, and that was when I suddenly felt cold.

She seemed to notice it too, looking down at the diaper. I hadn't really peed myself, had I?

The wet patch on the sheets where I'd just been confirmed it; *brilliant.*

She didn't look disappointed, just gave a half-smile and then went to her box of collected materials. It only took her a few seconds to swap out the soaked diaper for a dry, lighter one, and then she wiped me off completely to make sure there wasn't anything left on my fur and quills. She acted like she had done this a lot.

As we walked out and down the stairs, I found the house still quite quiet and peaceful; I'd be fixing that once my throat had recovered from the last run. I heard a soft humming coming through the ceiling, and then after a moment, there was a loud thump as something heavy hit the floor of the attic.

The man passed by and pulled on the rope hanging from the ceiling, opening a small hatch and then pulling down a folded ladder to the ground. He hollered something into the attic and I heard Sonic's voice groan something back.

He sounded like he didn't want to be awake. Aha! Perhaps my plan hadn't gone awry after all!

BZZZZZ...BZZZZZ...BZZZZZZ...BZZZZ-Thud!

Sonic pulled the covers further over his head, his phone still buzzing and bouncing about on the floor as his alarm went off. Ugh, he *hated* Monday Mornings.

He reached an arm out and felt along the floor for the phone, finally finding it and then running his finger over the edge over and over until the vibrating finally quieted. There, now he could go back to-

BRRRRRRIIIIIIIIING!

Sonic groaned loudly as Tails' old-fashioned alarm clock now went off, a loud, annoying screech. The hedgehog grabbed his pillow and shoved it over his head, "Tails, shut it off!" His muffled voice hollered at the fox.
The ringing stopped after a few seconds, but then the blanket was ripped back and Sonic yelped as he was pulled out of the bed entirely and dropped to the floor. "Gyah!"

"Arise, Hedgehog." Knuckles announced, releasing Sonic's legs. "The sun will grace the horizon soon."

Sonic's ears folded back as his quills sparked with a charge, "I'll grace your *butt* with my-"

The attic door opened and Tom's voice hollered up to them, "Get up! You've got school!"

Sonic groaned loudly again, and then sat up and saw Tails already up and putting his shoes on. "Ugh... *Morning people...!*"

"It was your idea to get up from bed and investigate the infant's crisis." Knuckles set about carefully folding his blanket at the foot of his bed, tilting his head to dodge a dirty sock being thrown at him.

"He was screaming his head off, what else was I supposed to do?" He looked over to Tails, "And *you!* How're you able to sleep through that!?"

Tails looked up, and then Sonic's eyes widened as the fox reached into his ears and pulled out earplugs. "Huh? Were you talking to *me,* Sonic?"

"You... Unbelievable!"
Sonic got up and marched towards the stairs, "Ugh! I can't believe you, Tails!"

Tails looked at the echidna as the hedgehog left, "What'd I *say?*" He asked, and the echidna waved a hand in dismissal.

Sonic fumbled down the stairs and wandered into the living room, dropping back down on the couch with his face in the throw pillows.

"When I said to get up, that wasn't what I meant and you know it," Tom informed, patting the hedgehog on the back.

"Isn't there some sort of break a new older sibling can get with a new baby?" Sonic groaned, "Like how Mom got time off work when you guys adopted us to help us settle?"

"Sorry, Sonic." Maddie called from the kitchen, "No sibling leave."

"Ugh..."
He rolled off of the couch and pulled himself up onto his feet, trudging to the table and plopping down on a chair. He rested his head on the table, staring blankly forward until Knuckles came into his view.

His eyes then shifted over to Maddie, who was pulling a box of cheerios out of the pantry with one arm and holding the baby with the other. The baby was looking directly and didn't look guilty *at all* about what had happened the night before. Sonic had to wonder if babies at that age could feel guilt, though.

Maddie placed the cereal on the table, then took the milk from Tom and placed it down in front of Sonic. Tails came hovering back with three bowls and spoons, distributing them to each place at the table. "You'll get used to it," Maddie informed, "Eventually his cries will just be background noise for the most part."

"If we are honest, you have never been appreciative of Monday mornings, and would likely have been this grumpy even if the infant *hadn't* been in distress." Knuckles murmured, taking the first turn with the cereal box.

"Well, *Tails* is only *Mr. Sunshine* today because he put dang earplugs in to block the baby out...!"

Tails perked up, "I didn't put the earplugs in to block the baby out." He expressed, "I put them in to block out your snoring at 3 AM."

"What!? I don't snore!"

"Sonic, you're louder than Carl's chainsaw." Tom informed, "Take it from someone who had to listen to it all night in that hotel on our way to San Fran."

"Ouch, Donut Lord..."
Sonic finally picked his head up from the table, "So what are we gonna do about the baby then? Did either of you call in?"

"We're still discussing a plan." Tom borrowed the milk to pour a little into his coffee, "You and Tails have school, Maddie and I both have to go to work later. We're thinking since Knuckles will be staying home *anyway*-"

"*What!? No fair!*"

Knuckles nodded solemnly, "I will tend to the infant and the canine as adequately as I am capable. I am honored by your trust so quickly."

Maddie grinned, "Well, you impressed me with how you handled the *'Incident'* yesterday. I'll leave the number for the clinic on the fridge just in case there's an emergency, and you know how to get a hold of Tom. I'm also gonna write down some basic information in case you have questions."

Sonic pouted, "How is Knuckles supposed to get his schoolwork done if he's watching the baby all day?"
He knew that Knuckles was homeschooling because the crowded school halls and classrooms stressed him out, but it hardly seemed fair.

"He will not be awake the entirety of the day," Knuckles answered, "I will be free to tend to my studies during his naps."

Tom looked back and forth between the fox and hedgehog at the table, "Now, you guys remember the plan?"

Tails nodded, "We go to our classes, and then I go and watch Sonic at baseball practice, and then we both walk home *together.*"

"Right. Good job!"
Tom gave the fox a high-five and then looked back to Sonic. "And you'll make sure you both get home okay?"

Sonic's grouchy mood lifted as he nodded and gave his little brother a smile, "No worries, I'm not gonna let anything happen to you."

"Unbreakable promise!" Tails informed, giving Sonic a fist bump.
They both saw Knuckles look to the front door, humming softly. "What's wrong, Knuckles?"

The echidna was quiet for a moment, "...The infant's mother. We have not seen or heard from her yet... I would believe- or at least *hope*- that a mother would have noticed her child's absence and come looking for them by now."

Sonic's mind thought back to that first night on Earth. He'd sat amongst the trees and out of sight for hours, waiting- *hoping*- that another ring would appear and Longclaw would appear; that she'd won and was only *delayed* in joining him.
Days would pass, and that hope would linger just a little bit, but eventually... The spark went out, and he knew he was truly alone.

Knuckles had gone through the same thing; he sat in his hut, his spear in hand, waiting for his father and the rest of his tribe to return from battle... And not one of them did.

All of those echidna warriors advancing against Longclaw, that was Sonic's last memory of his guardian. *She* never came for *him*, and *they* never returned to *Knuckles*. Had she killed them all herself? The murals he and Tails had found on their quest to find the Master Emerald had revealed the Owls were a formidable group and Longclaw was one of them, but Sonic had to think that even *Longclaw* would've had trouble taking *all of them* out while being wounded and severely outnumbered.

Sonic had never talked about it with Knuckles; it was too painful a memory for both of them to really sit down and discuss it. But was it possible... Was it possible that something *else* had taken out the echidnas that survived? There were tales... Old stories of a creature lurking about the islands around the one Sonic lived on. Those stories were one of the reasons Sonic had come to dislike being near the water; stories of a fantastical emerald giving immense power, he could wave those off as made-up when he was a kid, but a sea monster that could grab him from the shore and drag him down to the bottom? He wasn't chancing *that!*
Especially now that he knew the Master Emerald turned out to be *real!* Could this *supposedly mythical,* but now possibly *real* beast have been the cause of an entire tribe being wiped out in one moment?

"Sonic?"
The hedgehog shook out of his thoughts, finding Tails' hand on his arm. "You okay?"

Sonic blinked and then nodded. "...Mmmhmm." He assured.

Tom didn't seem too convinced, but he nodded. "Alright... Well, finish your cheerios before they get all soggy."

Sonic lifted his spoon out of his bowl, "Ugh...Too late."

Chapter 6: Tremors

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hurry up, Sonic, or we'll be late!"
Tails leaned over the side of the truck bed, watching the door for his older brother to join him. The sun was peeking over the horizon and through the trees, sending little shafts of light onto the freshly painted exterior of the house. He could see faint flashes of blue through the attic window, Sonic rushing about and collecting his items for school.

Finally, the hedgehog came rushing out and flipped over the side of the truck and into the bed. "Ta-da!" He announced before Tom pulled his foot off of the brake and the truck jolted, knocking Sonic down. "Hey! *Jerklord!*"

Tails sat down, his hands grasping onto the straps of his backpack, "Why can't you keep all of your stuff in one place? It would make going out the front door faster."

"Oh come on, Tails! It's only like three seconds to you guys. Besides," He lowered his voice to a whisper, "I was also trying to find an excuse to stay home, I'm exhausted."

"Sorry about that. Maybe we can stop by the hardware store and buy earplugs for you after school."

"Nah... Now that I know how to calm him down, it'll be a breeze to quiet him down if he does it again..."

The ride to the school yard was short, and then they both hopped out of the truck bed and waved to Tom. "Have a good day at work!" Tails wished.

"See you two later this afternoon," Tom responded with a wave, "Stay out of trouble, Sonic!"

"Remember who you're talking to!"
The pair watched their dad drive away and then started towards the doors at a leisurely pace.

"Hey Sonic?" Tails whispered, "Let's not tell anybody about the baby just yet."

"Huh? Why not?"

"Well, I don't want them to get all excited about us having a new brother until we know he's gonna be staying with us. What if his mom shows up at the police station and asks Dad where he is?"

Sonic frowned, but nodded. "Yeah, I guess so... Gotta pretend everything's normal- Well, *our* sort of normal."

Tails beamed, "Our sort of normal..."

Mother has decided me to be responsible, I will not let her down.

It had only been one day since the baby had been brought into their home, and Knuckles had barely engaged with him. Sonic had been practically two feet from him all the day before when he was home, and he was always either in their mother's arms or sleeping.

But somehow, his actions when the baby had thrown up on him was enough for his mother to be convinced he could handle watching over him for a few hours. He didn't understand it, but he was going to do his very best to make her proud.

"Okay," Maddie tapped the paper on the fridge with the pen, "I've written it all down, but just for reference... One scoop of formula for a full bottle, if he spits up, there are rags in the drawer here. If he cries, try a bottle, check his diaper, and try laying him down for a nap. You know Ozzie's food routine, and we'll take him out on his walk this evening like usual... Make sense?"

"I will follow your instructions to the letter, Mother. And in the event of an attack on our home, I will ensure the infant is safe before engaging the enemy."

Maddie bit her lip, "I'm glad you have your bases covered, Honey, but I wouldn't just *assume* that someone is going to attack our house."

"Your home was attacked and damaged twice within one year."

"Don't remind me..." Maddie mumbled under her breath, and then bent down and gave Knuckles a one-armed hug, and then a kiss on the baby's forehead. The baby squeaked in protest, but she just grinned. "Alright you two, be good. I'll stop by for a few minutes on my lunch break to make sure everything's going okay."

"Have no fear, Mother. We will both perform admirably!" Knuckles promised.

Maddie grabbed her bag and then headed for the door, giving them one last wave before closing the door. After the morning's rush of the others getting ready and heading out, the house was finally quiet.

Knuckles walked over to the window and looked out as Maddie pulled out of the drive and headed down the street, the sun peeking through the trees. It was a shame that their house was blocked off by so many trees, it made it hard to see the sunrise.

He had seen it proper one morning, when he'd first come to live with them in the house. Sonic had decided to show the echidna all of his favorite places, and one such place was what Sonic called *Holler Rock.* A small plateau along the mountain cliffs, it jutted out just a bit, and you could see the entire town from it. According to Sonic, it was the perfect place to just yell whatever you wanted and have nobody hear it, even though it echoed off of the other cliffs and the valley below.

"You have to see a sunrise from there one of these days, it's spectacular!" The hedgehog had said. So a few days after that, Knuckles got up incredibly early and made the trek. He wasn't

as fast as Sonic, but he was still plenty fast compared to the humans in town, and so he made his way up the ridge, taking the path Sonic had worn into the stone.

He then sat down on the chilly, smooth stone of the plateau, and waited.

The hedgehog hadn't been kidding. The second the sun's rays broke over the top of the cliffs on the other side of the valley, it was like being hit with a wave of warmth. It cascaded down the cliffs and washed through the trees and rivers, setting the town and surrounding forest aglow in warm, golden light.
He could have sat there and felt the sun's welcoming embrace for hours, except that Sonic came rushing up the cliffs a little bit later, saying Maddie had freaked out when she got up and he was gone. Knuckles made it a habit to leave notes on the coffee maker whenever he left early in the morning after that.

It was one of his favorite places now too.

"OW!"

He was snapped out of his thoughts by his head being yanked to one side, and he looked down at the baby, whose fingers were tightly gripped around one of his dreadlocks.
"Heh...You are already a *strong one!*"
He tugged his dreadlock free and then lifted the infant up. "Yes, I will train you when you are of age. A warrior, capable of facing every threat! We will defend this planet together, you and I..."

The baby didn't understand, but he did coo a bit, reaching out for his dreadlocks again. The echidna sighed, tilting his head off to the side and letting him grasp them again. "Not to worry, little one... I can take a little tugging, now that I am aware of it."

Being left with the echidna wasn't so bad, I supposed. I had no quarrel with the echidna. He was a friend of Sonic's, but even Sonic hadn't really been the one I was upset with, just a means to an end.

He'd gone to the window and gotten lost in his own little world, just staring. I wondered what he was looking at, or thinking about that had enveloped him so intensely... But I *did* know how to snap him out of it.

With a sharp yank to his quills, I'd pulled him back into the present, and he hadn't even seemed all that mad about it. If anything, he seemed happy that I'd snapped his head to one side. He held me out and said something with a triumphant tone, as if he were proud, and then allowed me to grasp onto the quills again.

I didn't pull as hard after that, I felt no need for it and I hadn't quite gotten the reaction I had anticipated. He kept me in one arm as he wandered the house, checking every room and turning out any lights that did not need to be on, which covered every room but the living area and the kitchen. Why? Why was it important for the lights to not be on?

And then he put me down on the couch briefly, pointing a finger to me and telling me something, and then pointing at the canine and stating something to it. I hoped he was telling to keep well away from me, I was certain it could crush me if it felt inclined to do so. What he told *me* I had no idea, but I guessed it was something along the lines of *'Don't go anywhere...'*

No problem there.

The echidna went to a cabinet and opened it, looking through papers inside of it and looking back at me every few seconds, and then pulled out a few papers and a pencil.

He was coming back to take me back up again when he paused... He looked around, and then I felt it too... Something was coming. The canine seemed to notice it too, growling softly as he looked towards the window.

The echidna sat down on the couch slowly, still looking around. He set the papers down on the low table in front of it and then began to write on the paper, which had a series of symbols and numbers on it. I recognized them as math equations, but I had no idea how any of them worked.
A few minutes paused, and the feeling didn't go away. The canine's growls came and went in short spurts, but now they were accompanied by whines. The echidna looked like he was trying to focus on the equations and solve, but was having trouble concentrating.

I felt a shiver, like a shudder through the air, and then the echidna grabbed me up, abandoning his work and looking at the window as the shivers grew stronger. He whistled and the dog came closer, and then it wasn't just the air; the ground under his feet was beginning to tremble as well.
It only got worse as we all climbed under the kitchen table; dishes in the cabinets rattled loudly and silverware left on the counter bounced off and onto the floor, items on the walls began to swing back and forth, and the lights flickered. There was a loud pop and the sound of something shattering overhead, and I pulled my hands up and over my ears, my eyes squinted shut.

It was too familiar... Too *haunting.*

This was what happened when the laboratory that had held me prisoner had been destroyed. It had started with the tests, the pain, the Duke of Soleanna ordering scientists around.

To them, this was normal proceedure, a daily chore to rip my body part over and over and then they'd let it reform before starting over the next morning. Why? For the sake of science and the pursuit of knowledge.

To me, it was days upon days, weeks upon weeks of endless pain. I had grown tired of such acts, tired of being treated as nothing but a method for them to achieve immortal greatness, or immortal bodies. For whatever reason, it was this day that I chose that I had had enough, and was going to put a stop to it, to *all* of it. In what felt like only a moment, I heard the Duke yelling at me to obey him, to stop my oncoming 'tantrum,' some might say... But I only had one word for them... *'No.'*

A loud creaking and cracking broke me out of my thoughts, and the echidna placed a hand on my head, holding it against his chest as the quake continued. Then there was a loud scraping and screeching and the crash of shattering glass.

It felt like forever, but finally, the tremors began to fade out, the shaking lessening. The dog whimpered by the echidna's side, the echidna releasing my head to stroke its back in comfort. I could feel his heart pounding in his chest, his breathing hard, but easing as the panic began to subside.
He murmured something to me, and then carefully crawled out from under the table.

Items had been knocked over, fallen to the floor, and dust shaken from the crevices, but it didn't appear that much had been damaged. He stood up and I saw the first explosion over our head had been the lightbulb in the kitchen fixture blowing out, but what had caused that crash?
He tiptoed from the kitchen and into the entry, and I saw glass scattered on the steps. Looking up, I saw a large tree had fallen over, a branch protruding through the shattered window at the top of the stairs.

The echidna gave a sigh, and then looked to me and patted my head. I was safe, and that seemed to be his biggest concern.

They were doing quite well at pretending like they really cared about me.

Chapter End Notes

Babysitting my niece and nephew this week has really given me some perspective into this story, heh heh... ~~baby puke on your face and in your mouth... Good times~~

I incorporated the theory that animals can sense quakes before humans here. They felt like something was coming, but they didn't know exactly what until it hit, just they should seek shelter.

Chapter 7: Vet Visit

Over the next few days, I began to get some context for what this group's routine was supposed to be, as well as names.

The man had many names, but I'd narrowed the most commonly-used name down to Tom. He appeared to have taken in the other three- and now *myself*- as a parental figure, the same as his wife, who I'd determined was named Maddie.

The canine was Ozzy, and while I had determined that he wouldn't harm me intentionally, I still preferred to avoid him.

As for the fox and echidna, I hadn't really bothered to learn their names before like I had with Sonic; they weren't relevant and I wasn't going to be interacting with them, but now that I saw them every day, I had learned they were Tails and Knuckles.

Why did mobians give themselves such literal names? Every time one of them introduced themselves, it was like you could just look at them and say *'...Yes, I see that.'* Tails had two tails, Sonic was fast, it was rather obvious.

Aside from my first two days with this hodge-podge family, things had been relatively the same routine. Tom and Maddie went to their jobs, I guessed, and Sonic and Tails left the house and would come back with a bag full of papers that they would then sit and fiddle with.

Knuckles stayed at home with me and Ozzy, doing the same kind of paperwork. It took me the rest of that second day to realize they were all doing school homework, though why Knuckles was doing his at home and never actually went to the school was beyond me.

It brought me some evil delight to watch Sonic's irritation at being made to sit still for so long, gnawing at his pencil like a beaver and frowning when Tails *always* finished before he did.

After the quake had shaken the house, Knuckles had kept me and Ozzy under the table with him in case there were any aftershocks. There were a few, but they barely rattled the dishes. Maddie had returned after a few hours, presumably to check on us, and had also seen the shattered window. Fortunately, it appeared that was the only real damage done.

Other humans arrived on the third day to help Tom replace the window and get rid of the tree, but they never came into the house. Tom and Maddie didn't seem to *want* them to come inside; was it because of *me?* Or because of *all* of us mobians? How many people around here knew about us? If Sonic and Tails went to school with their children, I would assume quite a few.

After the first night's attempt had ravaged my throat, I had decided on Plan B; I wouldn't scream for long periods of time, I would instead wait until a precarious moment and then scare the living daylights out of whoever is the closest.
Thus far, it had resulted in a few spilled drinks, scattered papers and Tails falling out of the

air into one of the nearby trees after his brain prioritized covering his ears with his tails over keeping his tails rotating and keeping him aloft. His only injury was a scraped ankle after his foot caught on a branch on the way down, but it was still entertaining for *me.*

It was when I woke up on the fourth day that I really noticed how much *stronger* I felt compared to when they brought me here, but all I'd seen of this world had been that stall and this house. I hadn't seen that other officer either.

That changed that day.

Everyone in the home awoke early as usual, but something was different. Maddie had given me the bottle, changed my diaper, and everything else that went on when they were leaving the last few days, but she never handed me off to Knuckles. Instead, she wrapped a blanket around me, keeping my arms and legs pinned down, and then held me in one arm as she collected my duck toy, then hugged Knuckles and he bid farewell to *both* of us.

What was happening? Where were we going?

I was grateful for the blanket, however, as the air outside the house was cold and gusting through the trees. I pulled my ears back against my head and tried to duck deeper into the fabric, the wind whistling in my ears.

She walked out to her vehicle and carefully set me down in a large box in the passenger seat. She looked at me and smiled, murmuring some comforting words to me.
Hmph. Her words would be more reassuring if I understood what she was saying, or where she was taking me...

The drive was short and I refused to go to sleep, I'd fallen for that trick too many times the past few days. It was hard, the blanket being warm and the vehicle's vibrations trying to lull me into a relaxed state. I was certainly drowsy when we stopped and she collected the entire box from the seat, but the cold snapped me back into alertness.
The wind was even colder out here without the trees to block it; even Maddie seemed to shiver under her coat, a puff of mist leaving her mouth as she exhaled hard.

She released one side of the box to open a door, and a bell rung overhead... And then my senses were slammed with the sounds and smells of other animals.

"Oh, it's cold, I know...!"
Maddie cooed to the baby as she opened the door and the cold wind whipped into her car's cab. The tiny form ducked his head into the blanket, his tiny quills protruding outward as he shivered. "We'll be inside in the heating again in just a second, Baby...!"

Of course, the morning she chose to take him into the clinic had to have a cold snap blow through the night before, why *wouldn't* it?
She would have brought him in a few days before, but that little bit of hope that his mother would show up had hung on, and she didn't want her to arrive and find them messing with her baby.

But four days with no sightings, no rumors... Nothing. It would seem that this little hedgehog would've been on his own if not for that farmer's keen eye.
With that in mind and the little one having gained some strength since his arrival, she decided it was best to get some measurements and check him out in an official capacity... Not to mention finally give him a name that wasn't just *'The Baby.'*

Sonic, Tails and Knuckles had all been giving their opinions on a name for him, varying from somewhat normal names by Miles Tails Prower, powerful, destructive names courtesy of Knuckles, or 'Super-Cool' names from Sonic.

Tom had already shut down *Sonic Jr.* for the time being.

Maddie had an idea in her head, something that had come from her experience with the tiny hedgehog. She hadn't shared it with the others yet, but perhaps tonight they could finally settle on something and she could bring it up.

She tucked the box under one arm as she closed the car door and then hurried up the steps to the door, pushing it open and being met with the welcoming warmth of central heating, and the cachophony of dogs and cats.

"Maddie!"
Allison popped up from her place at the receptionist's desk, "Get in here where it's warm! Isn't it your day off? Oh, I see you have brought a little something or someone?"

"Yeah, you know how I told you Tom got a call out to Yale's farm? Well, it turns out it was for *this* little cutie."
She came around the counter and allowed the other woman to see the baby, who was presently trying to hide himself under the blanket where it was warmer still.

"Oh. My. Gosh...!" Allison squeaked, "He's the size of an enchilada...!"

"I know, right...!?" Maddie squeaked right back, "I would've brought him in sooner, but we were waiting to see if his mom showed up looking for him."

Allison's face shifted to one of concern, "Aww... No luck, then?"

"No... Not yet, at least. I hate to think she'd just abandon him, but..." Maddie paused for a second to let the thought hang in the air, and then moved on. "So I'm just going to get some measurements for reference and make sure there's nothing wrong with him."

"Of course, of course. Don't let Marissa see him, she may lose her mind."

Maddie beamed and then walked towards the back of the clinic. She looked down at the infant as he squirmed, giving her a frown. "What's the matter, sweetie? You not a fan of medical clinics, or are you trying to poop?"

The hedgehog continued to frown, his brows deeply furrowed and his ears folded back. He seemed to not be looking at her, but at the walls. She paused and looked where he was

looking, but all that was there was an empty wall and the striped wallpaper. "...Are you *judging the wallpaper?* Expensive tastes..."

She walked into one of the exam rooms and closed the door, removing him from the box and the blanket. He frowned even more when he was exposed to the cold. "I'm sorry... We'll get this done and then you can have your blanket back."

He was relatively still for the length measurement, and while he fussed at the coldness of the scale, he was still not very squirmy; he really *hadn't been* since he'd been with them, grumpy, but not super active.

Once she was finished with the measurements, she handed him his ducky blanket, letting him clutch onto it tightly. "See? You were good and now you get your toy...!"

There was a knock on the door and another vet tech came in, "Hey Mads, I thought you weren't- *'gasp!'*"

"Hi, Marissa..." Maddie giggled as the woman's eyes bulged out and she fell backwards the wall.

"The cuteness...! I can't...! I can't handle it...! I think I need to *sit down...!*"
She grabbed a chair and sat down, but then scooted over to the counter where Maddie was presently very carefully feeling the baby's belly for anything that seemed abnormal. He was still thin, but was taking the bottle quite well.
"Oh my god, he's the cutest thing I've ever seen."

"Yup... Only a few days old, we figure."

"What? How did he get here?"

"Dunno. Tom and Wade found him out at Yale's farm a few days ago, jut laying there all alone with no mother in sight."

"How're the other three handling it?"

"Oh my gosh, Sonic *adores* him. Tails and Knuckles like him too, but not as much as Sonic. The first night, he was screaming and screaming and I couldn't get him to calm down, and Sonic came down and got him to sleep in just a few minutes. Sonic loves being Tails' big brother, but I think being the big brother to an actual baby is his favorite right now."

"You thought of a name for him yet?"

"Not yet. I think that's tonight's mission.'"

Marissa gently reached out and stroked the little hedgehog's fur, "Oh my god, he's so soft and *silky.*"

"I know..."
Maddie hadn't had time yet to give him a bath, so she wasn't sure if it was just oil in his fur and quills or not, but they were incredibly shiny on top of being so soft. His fur reflected a

bluish sheen, while his quills were more of purple color when the light bounced off of them. She hoped this was natural, though she wouldn't care if it lost its sheen when he was bathed because that meant he was clean.

Come to think of it, she could easily do that right now.

"Hey Marissa, can you get me the infant tub from the other room? I think this little guy is ready for his first bath."

Marissa beamed, "Only if I get to *help*...!"

"Happy Hump Day, Tom!"

"Mornin', Wade..."
Tom sipped on his coffee as he wandered through the doors of the station, blinking at the brightness of the light.

"Oof, rough night?"

"Not really... Just worn out from replacing the window yesterday. It wouldn't have been so hard if not for the fact I was trying to keep number four a secret."

"Number four?... Oh, you mean the baby we found? How's he doing?"

"Pretty good, I think. He cried for a while the first night, but he's been pretty quiet since then. Maddie's taken him into the clinic this morning to get him all checked out and make sure there aren't any hidden problems."
Tom sighed as he sat down at his desk, "It's too bad his mama never showed... It worries me."

"You gonna keep him?"

Tom smirked, "At this point, probably... Sonic loves him- you know between all the complaining about smelly diapers and random bouts of *screaming* for no reason."

"Sonic screaming?"

Tom glared mildly, "*The baby,* Wade. If Sonic were screaming randomly for seemingly no reason, I'd be more concerned." He overlooked the papers piled on the desk, "We still gotta come up with a name."

"The kids got ideas?"

"Oh yeah. I told them to write down their favorites and we'll try to narrow them down this evening."

"Sounds like fun."

"Hmm. Anything interesting happen last night?"

"Nah. Missing toolbox, noise complaint, nothing too serious."
Wade yawned, and then got up from his own post, "So I am going to head back to my bed and crash until this afternoon."

"Well, have a good one, Wade."

"You do the same, Tom. Let me know what you decide to call the tyke, alright?"

"No problem."

As Wade left the station, Tom grabbed a pencil and scribbled a few words down. He'd need something to put into the name pool that night, too...

Chapter 8: A Baby Hedgehog by Any Other Name...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Well, *that* was embarrassing...

Whether I trusted Maddie and her associate not to hurt me or not, having their hands running through my fur and their constant cooing at me was more than a little irritating. It was no wonder that *normal* infants screamed, they never got a moment's peace when women were involved.

Unfortunately, there was little I could do but suffer through it. Although, when she pulled me out of that little tub, I saw just how much debris was left behind. Had I really been that dirty? The air was even colder when I was wet, but it was quickly remedied by a fluffy towel wrapped around me, scrubbing the water from my fur and quills and making them stick out every which way.

I was sitting there on the table clutching the toy that had been returned to me when Maddie's associate asked a question, and I felt something in the air shift. I saw Maddie's loving look to me change, her brow furrowing and her lips pressing into a thin line, and then she shook her head as she responded. When she took me into her arms and held me up against her chest, it felt like she was clinging to me a little tighter. Something the other woman had said had upset her, but what?

I had a feeling it had something to do with me.

We left the place relatively quickly after that, but it didn't seem like it was because of the conversation, but rather that everything Maddie had intended to do here had been done. When we finished up, she collected some supplies, placed me back in the box and we were off.

The cheer in her gaze had faded, and her posture deflated a little. Normally I wouldn't care about someone being upset, but when I was in such a helpless state and I had a feeling whatever it was would put me at risk, I had reason to be concerned.

I pushed it to the back of my mind for now; right now, I needed to let her know that it had been too long since my last bottle.

"Sonic! *Slow down!*"

Sonic paused as he heard the little fox's voice holler from a fair distance away. He turned around, barely seeing him standing on the other side of the street almost a whole block back. "Oops..." He mumbled, hoping nobody had noticed. The last thing he needed was to have someone call their dad and tell them that he'd accidentally abandoned his little brother at the crosswalk.

Tails stood on the edge of the sidewalk, looking patiently at the crosswalk sign, waiting for it to turn from a hand to a person.

"Come on, Tails!" Sonic hollered as he came up to the other side, "Just fly over!"

Tails shook his head, "I'm waiting for the sign like you're supposed to." He informed. He gripped the straps of his backpack, waiting some more before finally the sign shifted and he hurried across to the other side.

"Why wait?"

"Because I learned that not waiting, especially not at the crosswalk, is Jaywalking and illegal."

"It's not like that law's *enforced,* Tails."

"No, but what if everybody in town found out that their sheriff's son was a jaywalker who broke rules just because he won't get in trouble for it?"

Sonic tilted his head in contemplation; he hadn't thought of *that*. "Hmm... Fair." He muttered, and then they started on their way again. "So, who do you think is gonna win the naming contest tonight?"

Tails shrugged, "Maybe we just try all of them and see which one he responds to?"

"But what if he responds to it because he thinks it's goofy and not because he likes it? Dad says he can't be *Sonic Jr.* because he'd have to be my son, but Sonic the Second is still up for grabs!"

"But other than being another hedgehog, he doesn't really look a lot *like* you, Sonic."
He pulled Sonic to a stop at another crosswalk, "...What do you think happened to his mom?"

Sonic bit his lip, he didn't really want to wonder about that. He didn't even know what had happened to *his* birth mom.
His earliest memories were with Longclaw, and to his knowledge, she never mentioned his birth mother or family. She always told him that his power would mean someone would *always* want it; had his birth family given him up for the same reason she sent him here to Earth? Were they trying to protect him by hiding him with Longclaw, or had they decided that raising him themselves just... Wasn't worth the trouble?

"I...I don't know, Tails." He muttered, looking up at the crosswalk sign as it changed. "Come on. Mom will be looking for us."

Tails seemed to notice he'd struck a painful spot, and the two of them didn't say much more to each other the rest of the way back to the house.

They walked into the house and dropped off their bags on their hooks, greeted by Ozzy as the golden retriever got up from his place by the kitchen island. "Hey, Ozzy."
Sonic patted the dog on the head and then listened. The house was incredibly quiet, but he knew Knuckles should still be there somewhere.

He walked into the living room, finding Knuckles lying on the couch and fast asleep, with his schoolwork scattered on the coffee table and his pencil tucked in one fist. Knuckles rarely if *ever* napped when at home alone, he didn't feel like he had the luxury of leaving the house- and the Master Emerald- undefended when he was the only one left to keep watch.
Sonic knew he was a light sleeper and had expected that if he had simply dozed off, their entering the house would have snapped him out of it.

"Let's not wake him," Tails whispered, "He must need the sleep..."

Sonic nodded, looking to the steps and seeing his parents' door open. He and Tails tiptoed up the stairs and peeked in the door, "Hey, Mom."

Maddie sat on her bed, the baby settled in the middle and watching her closely as she folded laundry and put it into piles. "Welcome back, you two." She greeted.

"Did you see Knuckles?" Tails asked softly, "He's asleep."

"Yes, I know. I checked on him earlier and he said he just didn't get good sleep last night. It's been pretty quiet, so I just left him to it."

Sonic then turned his attention back to the infant, "Hello...!" He cooed softly, "Look at you! Did you get all checked out at Mommy's clinic?"

Maddie grinned, "Yup, he's all good and clean, too! Got a bath and everything."

"Did he get any shots?" Tails asked, rubbing his arm absentmindedly where he himself had gotten shots a few months before.

"Nope, not today. He was getting kinda fussy at the end, so I decided not to push it."

Sonic's ears pricked as he picked up on his mom's tone of voice, she sounded tired... Or perhaps upset about something. "What's *wrong*?"

She looked up and gave him a comforting smile, "Oh, it's nothing to worry about, Sonic."

She wasn't gonna tell him, but he also knew better than to try and pry for it. He'd just have to suffer through not knowing... Or perhaps initiate his old eavesdropping habit again.

Tails hopped up onto the bed and crawled over to her lap, "Did you think of any names for the baby, Mom?"

"I did... But I'll share my ideas later at dinner. Speaking of which,"
She picked him up and had him replace her on the bed, "Watch him for a second while I go see what all we have for dinner."

"Can we go out tonight?" Sonic asked.

"Not tonight, Sweetie. We went out twice last week."

"Aww...!"

Tails plopped down on his belly to look at the baby, resting his head in his hands. "Hey there..." He greeted, "Don't worry, tonight you'll get your own name, and then you'll officially be a part of the family!"

While that was mostly true, Sonic had to remember the paperwork it would take to get him officially theirs to keep. Perhaps *that* was what his mom was worried about, that the government would think four adolescent aliens in one house would be too much and they'd take the baby away.

Heck, they didn't even know if the baby had *powers* like he and Knuckles did. Maybe he was just normal, like Tails! Well... *More normal* like Tails.

He bent down and pressed his forehead against the baby's gently, "Don't worry..." He whispered, "If anybody tries to take you away... They'll have to deal with *me* first."

Everyone brought something different to the literal coffee table that night.

Sonic had a long strand of papers he'd taped together into a scroll he'd wrapped around two rolling pins in a dramatic fashion.
Tails had several papers with not only the names but their origin and meaning alongside each one.
Knuckles had one paper with his choices scrawled out in big letters with a bleeding pen.
Tom had his little scrap with scribbled ideas, and Maddie had one small slip of paper like a fortune cookie, neatly folded and resting in her palm.

The baby sat on a folded-up comforter, currently trying to flip himself over onto his stomach as Sonic begged to go first.
"Okay, so since my first idea has been shut down..." He frowned at Tom and then scribbled on his scroll. "...Here are my other ideas... Sony, Cinos- That's Sonic backward, by the way- Soaring, Soccer, Sonar-"

"Why do all of your idea start with S O?'" Knuckles interrupted.

"Cinos doesn't."

"The same principle, Hedgehog. Besides, *look* at him!"
The echidna gestured to the tiny shape, who was currently trying to shove his entire fist into his mouth. "He does not seem pleased with *any* of them."

"Oh, I'd like to see you do better!"

Knuckles cleared his throat, holding out his paper. "A future warrior deserves a name that speaks of his potential, that will define him as powerful and capable! So upon overlooking the many names I had come up with, I suggest we call him... Soulspear! Destroyer of evil!"

"Uh...No." Tom mumbled, "That's not the best name for a baby, Knuckles."

Tails placed a hand on the echidna's shoulder, "Maybe you can name your pet *iguana* Soulspear, Destroyer of Evil!" He suggested.

"Um... When were you planning on getting a pet iguana?" Maddie worried.

The echidna nodded firmly, "As soon as you and Father have deemed Ozzy capable of having a fellow patrol partner."

"Well, if or when you get your own pet- iguana or *not*-" Tom expressed, "You may name it whatever you wish... Alright Tails, what're your ideas?"

Tails fiddled with his papers, "Okay, so I was thinking about both a first and middle name, like how the girl that sits next to me in math class is named Molly June. So even if you don't like any of them as a first name, maybe a middle name?"
He looked at his first paper, "So, here's what I was thinking... I was thinking Martin, but he's a hedgehog, so that's out. I also have Thomas, named after Dad-"

"Aww..." Tom cooed, "Thanks, Bud!"

"And then Richard-"

"Nope. Can't do that." Sonic informed, "If I learned *anything* from watching Batman, it's that Richard is a terrible name for a kid cuz of the nicknames."

Tails frowned, "O-Okay... Um... What about Phillip? It's not super common-"

"Not to mention old-fashioned." Sonic complained, "Besides, then somebody could just call him *Phil*!"

"What's wrong with Phil? That's the guy at the grocery store's name!"

They turned as the baby squeaked, looking at them with interest. "Huh? Do you like that?" Tails asked hopefully, "We can call you Phillip!"

"How about we see what your dad and I were thinking, and if we find something *better*, then we can use that for a middle name, how's that sound?" Maddie pulled the little fox closer to her with a grin, and Tails nodded. "Alright, what about *you*, Babe?"

"Well, I took into consideration that our three boys' names all have something to do with their abilities or quirks. Seeing as we don't know if this little guy has powers or not, I was basing my ideas off of color in this case..." He picked up his paper, "I was thinking something along the lines of Midnight, Starlight, Moonlight, Twilight-"

"No no no no no!" Sonic waved his hands, "No Twilight! There is no way I'm letting my little brother be associated with that!"

They then all looked at Maddie with her tiny scrap of paper, clutching it close to her chest. "Mom?" Tails asked.

Maddie grinned, "Well, I'm glad your dad and I were on a similar track by looking into his appearance for the time being..." She reached out and scooped the baby up into one arm, holding him close as she handed the paper to Tails.

Tails unfolded it, his ears pricking up in interest. "Obsidian!" He announced.

"*Ooh.*" Tom beamed, "Nice one, Babe."

"What is Obsidian?" Knuckles asked.

"It's a black crystal that forms after a volcano cools down," Maddie informed, "but it also can have little colorful fragments in it. So like how his fur is black here in the shade, but when you put it in the right light..."

She held him out carefully into the evening light peeping through the window, setting his quills and fur alight with the blue and purple sheen she'd observed. She'd found to her delight that the bath she'd given him that morning *hadn't* gotten rid of it, and had in fact made it even *more* vibrant.

The others all looked at each other, smiles appearing on their faces. "Obsidian Phillip Wachowski!" Tom cheered.

"Yay!" Tails came over and patted the infant's head gently, "You've got your own name!"

Even Obsidian seemed a little happy about it, his frown fading to a curious look.

Maddie pulled him back up against her, "Obsidian... Our little, beautiful crystal..."

Chapter End Notes

And with that, he is no longer just "The Baby!"

Chapter 9: Take Me Out to the Ball Game...

...Have you told those government guys about him yet...?

Marissa's question had been innocent enough, and understandable, but it still had felt like something sharp dug deep into Maddie's stomach. Ever since they'd found Obsidian, she'd had that thought settled in the back of her head, but she hadn't allowed it to be pulled up to the forefront; it wasn't important right now, they'd deal with that when they got to it.

Honestly, how many people in the world brought a new baby into the house and were expecting government agents in suits and armed with weapons to show up at their door?

Sonic could cause massive blackouts when he got upset, Tails had the mechanical intuition to build weapons of mass destruction- as evidenced by all of his gadgets they found and used in Hawaii- and Knuckles could probably topple a multiple-story building if he really wanted to hit it hard enough. Those were things she more or less could understand the government being concerned about, but they were still kids- they didn't have any intention of hurting anyone out of maliciousness, they were just trying to figure themselves out as they went from kids to teens and so on. Growing up was hard!

Obsidian, on the other hand... At this point, he couldn't even hold a bottle of formula on his own; what kind of threat to world security could he *possibly* be?

But they'd find out about him *eventually...* And that was what kept Maddie awake that night as she stared up at the slowly-spinning ceiling fan. What was she going to do when it happened? How was she going to protect this little life?

"Babe...?"
Maddie looked over as Tom rolled over to face her, "Hey... You okay?"

"Yeah... Just wondering what's gonna happen now... Walters will show up and see Obsidian eventually."

"Yeah, but we don't have to deal with that *tonight,* do we?"

"If I don't worry about it now, then I'll have to worry about it later."

Tom sat up a bit more, "...That's your argument. Genius."

Maddie plopped down on the pillow, "Sorry, I just... The other boys were traumatized enough before the government tazed them, locked them in cages, and tried to lock them up for working with Robotnik... I don't want Obsidian to grow up with the same kind of thing, he's been through enough being abandoned..."

"Maddie, you can't control everything... And I know that if Walters tries anything, you and the boys will do everything in your powers to keep the baby safe... Now try to get some sleep, you have work in the morning."

Maddie sighed, rolling over and turning out the lamp, "Okay, okay..."

She settled under the blanket, watching the fan spin once more. In the quiet of the room, all that was heard was the occasional clink of the fan's pull chains touching together, and the soft chirps of Obsidian asleep at the foot of the bed.

Worry about it later... It'll be fine...

'Phil'... Hearing even just that one syllable of my old name caught my attention. I hadn't known exactly what they were all doing at first that night, but as soon as I heard that and looked up, I saw Tails get excited; they were trying to come up with something to call me, which I supposed was fair.

Phil apparently hadn't won out, but it was still a part of their final decision; after that, I had been designated Obsidian. It was a rather obvious nod to my fur color- still following that ridiculous tradition- but I had to admit, it fit better than they realized.
Obsidian- a crystal mineral much like what I had once taken the form of- that came from the cooling lava of a volcano, a nod to my former other half, Iblis.

But my new name wasn't the *only* thing I was learning.
I had often heard that the best method for the mortals to learn a new tongue was to immerse themselves in a place where their own language was not spoken, but now I fully understood what that meant.

My enhanced level of understanding lent to the speed at which I was finding out what words meant, just by listening to the common words my housemates used and what they were referring to. As several days passed, I began to make sense of more and more, until I could get the context of the conversations between them.

Sonic was the first of the three to arrive, evidently; that didn't surprise me, he was *always* the first to arrive somewhere. He spoke a lot of chilly dogs- I could not figure out why someone would want to eat cold tubes of meat, to be honest- a sport known as baseball, and of some being known as Batman.
I had yet to uncover who this man was, or why Sonic seemed to idolize him so much; it made me wonder how *long* the blue hedgehog had *been* on this planet.

Tails and Knuckles both arrived about the same time, and from what I could gather, some... *Misunderstandings* had occurred. Knuckles would cringe whenever it was bought up, and he also spoke quite a bit about the Master Emerald...

So it existed in this world too... *Interesting.*

Tails talked in the most uncommon and unfamiliar words out of everyone, words I guessed were supposed to be names for each of his inventions when he would show them off. He was quite good at creating these tools and devices; he was also good at using pieces of other tech he found to do so, resulting in Maddie having to buy a whole new blender.

Other names were tossed around from time to time: Wade, Walters, Rachel, Jojo... I didn't know to whom those names went, but they must be close to them if they were mentioned so frequently.

But one name was *also* tossed about relatively frequently, a name that *clearly* left a bad taste in their mouths... *Robotnik.*
I could only assume it was Dr. Ivo Robotnik that they spoke of, and the fact that they had *already* encountered him- or even encountered him *at all*- was not something that comforted me. I couldn't help but wonder if he had been involved in whatever had upset Maddie that day. It was still bothering her, but she had been getting better at hiding it.

After several more days, I had figured out their schedule and what was typical for any given day. Most days, Sonic and Tails went to school, Maddie and Tom to work, and they were all back home by the evening, while Knuckles did his schoolwork at home and kept an eye on me.
During the periods of time that Knuckles was working on his homework and the rest of the household was quiet, I devoted time to improving my motor and communication skills. I figured that communication needed to be the first thing; if I could just *tell* them how I felt or what I wanted, then I wouldn't have to crawl around so much. I would try to practice one syllable a day, which appeared as just babbling to *them.* They encouraged it regardless, which was still something I was trying to figure out. How long were they going to keep this *'we like you and want to treat you right'* facade going?

I was starting to wonder if maybe... It *wasn't* a facade.

Today, things went a little differently. Maddie came home sooner than she had been, or it felt that way. The word 'baseball' was being thrown around quite a bit as she checked on me and then Knuckles helped her collect my stuff.

We went out the door and into the car, and I tried my best to see what was happening, but I was still confined to a tiny car seat Tails had engineered for me; it would seem I was still far too small for the regular seats for human infants to fit me safely.

Knuckles sat in the other seat and looked back at me for almost the entire first minute we were on the move, just staring. I stuck my tongue out at him in response, and he smirked and finally looked away.

When we stopped and opened the doors, I heard a lot of human voices and my nose caught the smell of... A lot of different foods all at once. Where were we?
Maddie pulled the seat out of the car, and it was turned to not only was I out of the sun but also so I could see where we were going.

A tall fence was erected between us and a diamond-shaped field, where several young humans and Sonic were all standing around in uniforms of some kind. Other humans sat on metal benches off to the side, cheering and hollering things back and forth to the children.
I noticed the fence was taller here by the benches than it was the rest of the way around; what were they trying to protect us from?

My question was answered when the child in the center of the field suddenly threw something at the closest kid, who missed catching it and it slammed into the fence, rattling the metal before falling down to the ground; a small, white ball.
Now it made sense; the fence was there to protect us from poorly-coordinated children's attempts at deadly projectiles.

I saw Tom and Tails sitting on the benches and we joined them, and once Sonic saw us, he zipped over to the fence and looked at us with a wide smile. "Hi, Obsidian!" He greeted, "...Watch?"

So that was it; Sonic was playing a game of baseball and we were here to observe and- I guess- cheer him on.

Watching the other kids' speed at running around the field, I wondered how Sonic got permission to play against them, it hardly seemed fair to put him in when he could run hundreds of times faster than they could.

Sonic zipped back over to the other kids, and Maddie pulled me out of the seat and held me in one arm, Tom asked about food. When he returned a few minutes later, he had several little trays with food in them, one of which was little, yellow discs and some sort of bright yellow *paint.*
Imagine to my surprise when Maddie dipped a disc into the paint and then put it in her mouth!

Edible paint... The oddities of humans were never-ending.

Fortunately, she did not offer *me* any, instead finishing it herself and pulling a container of mashed fruit out of my bag.

A loud voice echoed over a speaker, and the humans' cheering grew louder; I saw the children all get into position, and then one of them held up a large wooden stick. He shifted his grip, his pose telling me he was quite focused, and then the kid in the center throw a ball once more.
This time, instead of hitting the fence, the boy with the stick swung hard, and with a crack, it shot off into the field. The humans' cheering grew louder as others in the field scurried after it, the boy dropped the stick and started booking it around in a circle. He didn't make it all the way back, but the other humans seemed excited nonetheless.

This was what Sonic talked about so much? Hitting a ball with a stick? I knew from Tom leaving the TV on in the living room one night that something called golf had the same principle...and was much quieter.

I have decided I prefer golf.

Chapter 10: Suspect

"Can we stop and get sweets today, Mom?"
Tails sat in the middle seat as they sat, Sonic on the other side making the same puppy-dog face. "We've been really good today!"

Maddie looked away from the road for a split second to give them a smirk before returning her attention to driving. "Well, I dunno. How did you guys do in class? You had a test and a report to deliver today, remember?"

"I got a B!" Sonic showed her the paper, "And Tails got an A!"

Tails smiled, "Uh huh! I got ninety-seven percent!"

"Only ninety-seven, huh?" Maddie smirked, "What happened to the other three percent?"

Tails gave a shrug, "My teacher said she took them off because I was using words above my grade level in my report and it made the other kids confused."

"Hurry up and make a decision, Mom!" Sonic panicked, "We're about to pass Marty's shop!"

Maddie rolled her eyes with a sigh and a smile, "...Okay."

"YES!"

"But I've only got five dollars with me, so each of you only gets to pick one sweet, okay?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" Tails' eyes sparkled, "I already know what I'm getting!"

Sonic crossed his arms, "Lemme guess... Those peppermint sticks?"

"How'd you know!?"

Maddie pulled up alongside the curb but kept the door locked as Sonic yanked on the handle. "Ah ah ah... What do we say?"

"Thank you for letting us get sweets, Mom!" Tails announced with a grin.

Maddie giggled and patted the little fox on the head, "Alright. Don't take too long, I still have to get home and pull the lasagna out of the freezer to thaw."

Sonic and Tails hurried out of the car and into the shop, Tails clutching the five-dollar bill Maddie had given him when Sonic was too excited to remember. "Hi, Mr. Marty!" He greeted.

The large man behind the counter grinned as he saw the two approach the displays, "I thought I heard two little furry footsteps comin' in here! you boy staying out of trouble?"

"As always!" Sonic assured with confidence.

"Mmmhmm... So, you here for something sugary?"

Tails nodded, "I'll take a peppermint stick!"

"Heh, can't go wrong with a classic! What about you, Speedball?"

Sonic zipped back and forth in front of the displays, "Gimme a second- Ooh, you got more of those caramel-covered pecans- Oh! And the brownie bites! Augh! My mom's making me choose only one!"

They turned as the bell over the door rang again, and Sonic and Tails froze in place when they turned and saw it wasn't their mom like they'd thought.

It was not someone they knew; in fact, it was someone they'd never even seen before.
The girl appeared to be in her late teens and her hair was dyed blue- though it had clearly been a while since she'd touched it up, as it had faded to a more gross-looking green color- and she was soaked head to toe. Her untied shoes squished as she walked into the store, her hands shoved into the pockets of her oversized army jacket.

"Hello," Marty murmured, looking occasionally at the terrified pair.

Sonic was sure he could grab Tails and book it behind the counter if she looked their way, but the girl didn't even look up from the floor; she just fished through her pockets and pulled out a few coins, putting them on the counter. "Bottle of water." She mumbled, "This enough...?"

"Yes. One bottle of water, coming right up."

The cashier grabbed a bottle of water from the cooler and placed it on the counter. The girl took it and turned back in the direction of the door. "Keep the change."

"O-Okay... Have a good day!"
The girl didn't even respond, just walked back out with the water. "..You two know her?"

Sonic shook his head hard, "Never seen her before."

"Well, I'm not sure *she* saw *you either,* to be honest... You might wanna talk to your dad about her, just so he knows there's a newcomer walking around."

Sonic nodded, taking his and Tails' small bags of sweets and handing him their two dollars before hurrying back out to the car. "Phew! That was too close...!"

"Hmm?" Maddie asked.

"That strange girl that came into the shop, she almost saw us!"

Maddie looked up and around, "What strange girl?"

"The one with blue hair that was all wet!" Tails peeked out the window, also looking around the street. "...I don't see her anymore, but she was there."

"And you've never seen her before?"

Both shook their heads, "Marty said for us to let Dad know."

"That's a good idea... How old was she?"

"Eh... Sixteen? Seventeen?"

"Hmm... Maybe a runaway." Maddie put the car into reverse, "We'll worry about it later, let's get you guys home. It's bath night too, you know."

Sonic pouted, "But I just took one two days ago!"

"And you're smelly, trust me."

"I thought you liked bubble baths." Tails murmured.

"Well, just because I like them more than showers doesn't mean I like taking them daily!"

"Hmm... Okay, so a girl about sixteen years old... Blue hair... Wearing an army jacket..." Tom scribbled down the description on a piece of paper, "...Was she wearing pants?"

"Dad. Come on." Sonic muttered, "Of course, she was wearing pants! They were jeans, and she had big sneakers on."

"And she didn't see you."

The boys shook their heads, "Don't think so."

"Good... I'll be sure to keep an eye out for her. Considering the next town over is almost twenty miles, I'd say she's run away a good distance already. I'll check for any missing person files too."

Knuckles sat at the table, watching his mom give Obsidian a bottle. "You believe this girl has people looking for her."

"Yeah, or at least I hope so. The more we know, the more we can help her get back where she belongs."

"If there are people that care about her, why would she run away from them?"

Tom gave a light smile, "Well... Growing up is hard, especially when you're a teenager. There's a lot going on, and sometimes they get upset, scared, angry, whatever, and they do things that aren't the smartest..."
He looked to Sonic, "Causing a massive blackout, for example...?"

Sonic frowned, "Or punching hedgehogs through the wall..." He mumbled.

Knuckles shoved a big piece of his lasagna in his mouth to prevent himself from saying something that would make things worse but hadn't thought about the temperature until it was too late. "Ah ah ah-!"

"Careful, Baby! It's hot!" Maddie warned as Knuckles' eyes began to water.

Knuckles had two options; either spit out the lasagna again and let it cool or keep his dignity. He chose the latter, grimacing as he managed to swallow the burning food down in one hard gulp before grabbing his cup of water and gulping that down as well.

"Easy, easy!" Tom warned, but Sonic looked like he was about to explode trying to hold in his laughter.

Obsidian, had no problem laughing at his older brother, cackling as Knuckles wiped his face off with his napkin. "Oh, you think my misfortune is amusing, do you?" Knuckles gave the baby a playful glare.

Nobody else seemed to notice it, but Knuckles did; Obsidian had seemed to register what he'd said, and not just that he was talking to him, but actually comprehending the words.
He hadn't had much interaction with infants prior to coming to Earth, and even then it was minimal at this point, but he had a feeling they weren't usually able to comprehend a sentence like that at such an early age. Was Obsidian particularly intelligent and gifted like Tails was? Did he understand everything he saw and heard?

The little hedgehog had gone back to slurping on his bottle, leaving Knuckles with his thoughts.

"You okay, Knuckles?" Tom asked.

Knuckles nodded, "The burning sensation is receding."

"Good... Sometimes, you gotta do what you gotta do."

Knuckles nodded, "Sometimes..."

Sonic finally released the breath he'd been holding, "Oh man, your face was redder than your fur, Dude!"

"Are you sure you're okay?" Tails worried.

"Worry not, Fox... I am an echidna warrior, a little heat cannot defeat me."

He finished his plate as quickly as he could- without burning his mouth again, of course- and then placed it in the dishwasher before offering to take Obsidian from his mom so she could eat her own plate. He took the toddler from her and took him into the living room and placed him down on his play mat.
He laid down facing him, his head in his hands as he watched the little hedgehog try to suck on his fist. "...You understand me, don't you?" He whispered.

Obsidian looked at him, but didn't actually respond with words; he simply might not be able to speak yet.

Knuckles pulled himself a little closer, and then pulled one of his gloves loose and off of his hand. He rarely did so unless he was washing his gloves, as he'd rather have others think the sharp spikes on his namesakes were a part of the glove and not actually on his hands.

It wasn't that he was ashamed of them, he'd just been trained from a young age to keep them hidden. All of the echidnas in his tribe had them, but his were longer than the other echidnas', and sharper too. When he was little, he'd had to have his hands wrapped in fabric to protect them from cutting his fingers, and his father had taught him to keep his hands curled up in fists most of the time to be on the safe side.

Now one hand of them was exposed to the air, and he turned his hand this way and that. "See this...?" He whispered softly, "...These are my little secret... Can you show me yours...?"

He placed the glove back on and Obsidian watched curiously, and then as Knuckles settled down on his hands again, Obsidian reached out. His tiny fingers brushed the echidna's nose, and then he whispered a soft, little sound.

"...Nuk."

Knuckles' lips split into a grin, and he patted the little hedgehog on the head. "Don't worry, this will remain our little secret..."

Chapter 11: To Grandmother's House We Go!

So, the echidna was in on my little secret. It wouldn't change things much more in the immediate sense, but I wondered what kinds of... *Advantages* it may provide in the future.

I had opted to try to learn how to speak their names first; one, because I knew that adults tended to get excited when their little one said their name for the first time, and two because I could yell at them specifically if I so chose. However, seeing as Knuckles spent most afternoons with me, it had only seemed fair that he got the first opportunity... And he'd chosen to keep it secret or now. Why? Why did he want to keep that to himself?

I had noticed over the passing days that I was developing faster than a human child would have. Granted how long it took for humans to be full-grown vs the hedgehogs of this world, I assumed that somewhere in between was natural.

I was gaining more balance, I was figuring out how to get onto my hands and knees, and soon enough I would be crawling, able to navigate the household- more or less- as easily as the rest of the occupants.

The days came and went, and life went on as what I guessed was usual. It was the beginning of the weekend, and Tom and Maddie had both gotten off for the day. Clearly, they had some sort of outing planned, as Maddie was stuffing sandwiches and snacks into a box and Sonic was zipping around madly in the kitchen.

Knuckles sat on the floor with me, occasionally looking up as Sonic dashed about. "Slow down," He ordered, "You are going to knock something over, and Mother will be displeased..."

"Don't worry, it'll be fun!"
Sonic was off again, hollering to Tails if he'd seen some item of his.

I looked to Knuckles and managed to catch his gaze, trying to ask him what in the world was going on. The echidna's body was tense, his arms crossed in front of him in a defensive position, and his jaw was set. It looked like he was trying to put up a calm, solemn front, but under that, something was bothering him.
Knuckles sighed, lowering his voice to a whisper. "We are going on a trip, to visit the mother of our father."

A trip to Grandma's house... No wonder the speedy blue child was so excited; that seemed to be a common thing to make young mortals happy. But why would Knuckles be uncomfortable about that? Had he not ever been? Was he worried first introductions wouldn't go smoothly?

As Tails came hurrying down the steps with another bag slung over his shoulder, I saw he was just as tense and nervous. "D-Do you think she'll like me?" He asked, "I read a book-"

Tom bent down and ran his fingers through Tails' fur with a smile, "She likes everybody, Tails. You'll be fine." He looked over to Knuckles and seemed to get the same vibe from him as I was, "*...Both of you.*"

Knuckles nodded, but the tension never left him. He scooped me up into his arms and we all started towards the truck, off on a new adventure with my temporary hosts...

The drive was only thirty minutes or so, but it was plenty enough time for Obsidian to zonk out in the middle seat of the truck. He was placed in the special car seat Tails had built for him, and was out like a light before they even hit the edge of Green Hills' town square.

Trips out to the Wachowski family farm hadn't been as frequent since Tom and Maddie had begun taking in alien kids. They took Sonic out a few times once he was comfortable in their home, but things had just been too hectic since Robotnik's second attack for them to properly take the whole family out to introduce Tails and Knuckles, and they hadn't even gotten a chance to mention Obsidian to Tom's mom yet.

Tom looked in the rearview mirror, seeing the older trio all seated in the back of the truck and looking out over the landscape. Tails and Knuckles hadn't been this far out of Green Hills yet, both having come directly into town via rings and using rings to travel long distances. Sonic had argued that flying over it didn't count, as they barely got to see any of it up close.

Tails marveled at the trees, Knuckles remarked on the mountains that surrounded them, and Sonic just beamed at their gawking and wonder. He'd run these hills numerous times over the years he was in hiding, but he clearly was enjoying watching someone else experience it for the first time.

"You sure your mom's going to like me, Dad?" Tails worried, "I read that farmers don't like foxes."

"That's because Earth foxes try to kill their chickens." Sonic reassured, "Grandma Maggie's great! And come on," He ruffled the kit's fur, "Who wouldn't love all this fluff?"

Tom smiled at their interaction, and then looked ahead, and the smile vanished with a groan.

Tom pulled up to a stop, rolling his eyes as he saw Carl standing at the edge of the woods with his shotgun and Wade standing there with him- or at least he was until Carl started moving towards the truck to talk to them.
"Hold on a second, guys." He muttered as the man approached and he put the truck in park, "Hi, Carl. I hope you remember what I said about just walking around with shotguns and chainsaws."

"Sheriff, you've got yourself another devil out in those woods." Carl alerted, "I saw 'em last night, almost *caught* 'em too!"

Tom did his best to keep an interested face on, "That so?"

Wade shrugged, "Something stole a pair of sneakers on his back porch."

"I saw 'em! I heard a commotion outside my cabin the night before last, found the shoes left behind on the ground. Left 'em out to dry out, and last night, I caught the new devil tryin' to snag 'em!"

"Maybe they needed sneakers?" Sonic suggested, "I needed new sneakers when Mom and Dad found me."

"I didn't git a good look at 'em, but I'd know those glowing eyes of a creature anywhere...!"

"We'll keep an eye out, Carl." Maddie assured, "Don't worry."

Sonic nodded, "If it's anything dangerous, we've got it covered!"

Carl gave the Blue Devil a look, and then returned to continue his discussion with Wade, allowing the Wachowskis to move on with their day.

"I hope there's not another one wandering around..." Tom whispered.

"For once, I agree. Four kids are enough... At least for now. Let these guys get settled first, and then maybe try and find a bigger house if this keeps up."

It was another ten minutes or so to the farm, and Sonic was practically bouncing up and down in the back of the truck as they came up the drive. Tom saw his mom coming out of the little farmhouse and waved out the window before pulling up in front. "Morning, Mom."

"I swear," The older woman marched up to Tom and put her arms around the man's neck in a hug, "Every time you come by, you've got a new truck."

"Hey, at least they're all used. I'm not that spendy... It's good to see you, Mom."

"You too, Sweetie... I hear you've got two more kiddos to introduce?"

Tom beamed and turned towards the back of the truck, "Alright, hop out!" He hollered.

Sonic zipped out of the back of the truck and up to the woman with a hug, "Hi, Grandma Maggie!"

"Hello, Sonic! You've gotten so much bigger since the last time I saw you, look at that!" She looked up as Knuckles and Tails carefully climbed out of the back and walked cautiously forward, "And you must be Tails and Knuckles."

Tails peeked out from behind Knuckles, giving a little wave. "Hello, Mrs. Wachowski..."

"A little timid are we...? Don't worry, dear, you're both as welcome here as with your mom and dad... *Speaking of Mom*-"

Maddie chuckled from where she was unstrapping Obsidian from his seat, "Almost there, Maggie... Come here, Sweetie."

She scooped Obsidian up into her arms and then looked to Sonic, "Can you grab his stuff, Sonic?"

"Yes, Ma'am!"

"Oh...!" Grandma Maggie cooed as she saw the tiniest member of the crew, "You are such a tiny little thing...! You didn't tell me you had a baby *too!*"

"It's been a busy few weeks... We found him recently born and all alone. We've been keeping an eye out for his mom, but... Nothing."

Maddie nodded, "So we made a decision."

"Obbie stays!" Sonic cheered as he slung the diaper bag over one shoulder and closed the truck door behind him.

"Obbie?" Tails asked.

"Thought we could shorten Obsidian a bit. Obbie rolls off the tongue better, don't you think?" He turned as he heard a sniffle, and then saw Obsidian shove his head into Maddie's shoulder with a soft cry. "What, you don't like it?"

Knuckles reached up and put a hand on Obsidian's back, watching the little hedgehog grasp onto Maddie's shirt for dear life like never wanted to let go. The echidna gave a slight smile, "No... I believe he likes it very much..."

Grandma Maggie bent down to Knuckles' level, "Now, I can tell Tails is a little fox, but what about you?"

Knuckles pounded his chest proudly, "I am an echidna, trained from birth to be a noble warrior."

"An echidna, huh...? Well, there's always room for a young, brave monotreme in my home." Knuckles tilted his head in confusion, and she chuckled, "Monotremes are the family classification for echidnas here on our planet. Not many of them *here, either*..."

"What do you mean?" Sonic asked curiously.

"Hedgehogs are a part of a group of many types of animals, and there are even seventeen different species of hedgehog here, but echidnas, there are only two kinds of echidnas and only five species in their monotreme family group."

"If there are two kinds, what are the other three in the monotreme family class?" Tails asked, coming out from behind Knuckles a bit more as intelligent conversation caught his attention.

"That would be platypuses. Such special creatures, just like *all of you*... Alright, let's get inside before the bugs beat us to it! Come on."

Sonic zipped into the house and the others all followed, and Tom paused to look at Maddie as Obsidian continued to snuggle deeper into the crook of her arm. "Getting all settled in, huh?"

Maddie smiled, "Yeah... I think he is..."

Chapter 12: Something Not Quite Right...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Had I heard him right? Had Sonic really said that they were going to keep me, and not in the case of a pet or novelty?

I couldn't stop myself from crying. In my entire memory- which was long- I couldn't remember a time when someone treated me in such a way. Before, I was a flame, a power unhindered... Then I was a science experiment, tortured and caged under the constant watchful eye of my captors... And then I was a tormented, rageful force that just wanted to destroy everyone that ever tried to lock me away or ever *would* try...

...I'd never been part of a family before.

I grasped Maddie's sleeve and sobbed into it; I never wanted to let go of her, I never wanted to let her, or Tom, or the others out of my sight.
They had taken me in, and for weeks I had tried to tell myself it was a trick, that they couldn't actually care about me like they were suggesting... But it was true. It was all true.

It took me a few minutes to pull myself together again, but I still gripped her sleeve, snuggling into it and sniffing it. This was the smell of Maddie... My new caretaker... My mother.

We entered the house and my nose was met with the smell of wood and spices. Massive, wooden beams spanned the ceiling overhead, large stones formed the fireplace, and little decorations of candles and flowers spread across the space added pops of color. It certainly felt welcoming, and Sonic was already plopping himself down on a barstool and talking a mile a minute to his grandmother- No, *our* grandmother.

It would take some time for me to grow accustomed to that concept. It was still dawning on me. I had a family now; brothers, a mother, and a father, and extended family through them. For the first time, not only was I part of a family, but I had a history of my own. I had a tie to the people of the world I was a part of, I was not just a looming entity that had little to no stake in whether the world itself lived or died anymore...

Tails and Knuckles both sat down on the other barstools, Maddie sat down with me at the kitchen table and Tom immediately went to work helping his mother with something on the counter.

Our grandmother then asked them to tell their tale, of how Tails and Knuckles had come to be with them. Tails started them off, and I also listened- as best as I could, at least.

Tails came to Earth after discovering Sonic through a power burst he sent off, one that evidently also took out power to a large majority of the country.
Tails idolizing Sonic and wanting to be like him wasn't something unusual to me, most of the

Tails' throughout time and space had done the same, but it was usually much earlier in the pair's lives than here.

Knuckles' part of the story clearly had more than he was willing to admit. He told our grandmother that he had come from a tribe of warriors, and that he was now the last of his kind following a war.
This was a significant difference; while not unknown to me, it was few and far between that the echidnas were ended by war, and not by the hands of their god of destruction, Chaos. Instead, Knuckles' tribe had been ended by a war between them and a group of owls, fighting over the Master Emerald.

Knuckles said that he had come to Earth seeking Sonic, who had been raised by one of the owls and he believed that Sonic would know where the Master Emerald was. Somehow, the two of them and Tails were able to find the Master Emerald, but the exact details seemed to be hidden behind embarrassed looks and comforting glances. Clearly, there had been some... *Bumps* in the road leading to that conclusion.

Not much could be said about *me*- at least, none that *they* were aware of. I had *quite* the tale to tell about how I came to be in the Wachowski's care, but that would have to wait until I was able to convey it, and even then, they might not even take it seriously.
To be honest... It might be best to pretend it had never happened.

Sonic then dove into the tale of their latest fight with Dr. Robotnik, complete with sound effects and lots of arm waving.
Minor differences in their personalities and histories aside, fundamentally, the three of them were the same adventurous and reckless trio that I had briefly encountered before...

After all of the chattering and storytelling was over, the food was taken out of the box and handed out. I latched onto the bottle with a new appreciation for it, so much that Maddie kept taking it from me and telling me to slow down.

Sonic still tried to talk with food in his mouth, Tails had clearly abandoned all worries about our grandmother's perception of him, and Knuckles... He was still quite tense. I wasn't sure if it was the details of their story he'd left out that was bothering him or not, but he still sat on the barstool a little hunched over, his grip on his sandwich a little tighter...

It is nothing, I am fine.

Knuckles kept telling himself that as if somehow that was going to convince the pain to take a hint and go away. He'd been telling himself that since the afternoon before; it had been just a twinge then, a dull pain that came and went. It had slowly worsened throughout the evening and into the night hours- not enough for him to express the pain outwardly, but just enough that he was unable to go to sleep. He floated in and out of a light doze, every twinge jolting him back out of it.

He couldn't tell the others; he was a warrior, and a warrior was not to show weakness or pain. Definitely not to his enemies, but he couldn't recall a time when his father had expressed pain

or weakness in front of him and the rest of his tribe, either; he was always strong, unfettered by such things.

Knuckles wanted to be strong.

Besides, this had happened before, and it faded out within a day or so. He just had to ride it out.

He ate his sandwich and then quietly wandered the living room while the adults cleaned up lunch. He held Obsidian in his arms, looking at the old photographs on the wall and side table. Photos of Tom when he was a child, of him and Maddie when they were teenagers, and a photo of what Knuckles recognized as his parents' wedding.

"Crazy isn't it?"

Knuckles looked up as Grandma Maggie came up to him, "Hmm?"

The woman took the photo of Tom as a toddler up into her hands with a smile, "...They grow up so fast... One day, they're tiny and learning to walk... And the next, they're getting married and having four little ones of their own."

Knuckles tilted his head, "Humans can grow up in only one day?"

The woman chuckled, "No, not really... But it can certainly *feel* that way."

"Hey, Knux!" Sonic hollered from the front porch, "We're gonna go practice our pitches and swings out in the field! Wanna come?"

"Go on," Grandma Maggie encouraged, "Your mom and I can keep an eye on the baby."

Knuckles looked to her and then gave a nod, handing Obsidian off to her and then heading out the door after his brothers.

The makeshift ball field appeared to have been there for quite some time, long before Sonic started coming here. Tufts of tall grass poked up around the bases, the ground compacted and dusty from years of feet running across it.
"Why does this place have its own field?" Knuckles asked curiously.

His father beamed as he adjusted his ball cap, "Well, before they remodeled the field in town and when I played baseball back in junior high, the team came out here to the field for practice. Lots of space to run, not many windows to worry about-"

"So long as nobody missed a pitch." Tails surmised, pointing to the farmhouse behind them and then waving at Maddie and Grandma Maggie who was watching from the front porch.

"Eh, nobody but *you guys* can throw the balls hard enough for them to go that far, but I tell ya, the number of hours we spent looking for home run balls in the corn fields some days... Alright, Knuckles. We're doing pitching first, batter up!"

Knuckles collected the wooden bat from its place, coming up to the plate and crouching carefully. He gritted his teeth as another pang hit him, but he hid it behind a look of determination.

"Okay, you gotta actually hit the ball with the bat this time, Knux." Sonic informed from the pitcher's mound, "No Power-Bumping it into Kentucky."

The echidna nodded with a grunt, "...Give me your best, Hedgehog...!"

Sonic grinned mischievously, and then the ball came flying at the echidna. Knuckles swung hard, but the ball whizzed past him. "Strike one!"

"You got this, Sweetie!" Maddie hollered from the porch, and Knuckles nodded hard as Sonic collected another ball from the bucket beside him.

Another pitch, another swing- Crack! The ball was sent flying into the air and out of sight.

"Nice!" Tails cheered from further out in the field.

Knuckles smirked, but it wavered as another pang hit him and his legs buckled a little.

"You good?" Sonic asked.

The echidna reset himself, brow furrowing. "Merely a slight cramp," He lied, "...I am fine."

—

Carl sat on his back porch, peering out into the darkness of the woods. Of course, the sheriff and deputy didn't take him seriously, he didn't have proof. They only accepted that the little blue devil was real when they'd seen him for themselves, and even then some of the townfolk tried to convince themselves it was all in their heads for a while.

Carl knew that the best way to prove something was with solid evidence, and the best way to get evidence, was to *catch* the darn thing.

The hardest part was going to be luring them back into range; they'd made off with the shoes, and he didn't know what else he could use as bait, but somehow, he knew that it would come back eventually-

Snap! Snap snap snap snap!

Multiple traps and tripwires went off as something scrambled across the ground, and the man was off. The amount of rustling and leaves being scattered told him it was too big to be a raccoon, and far too fast for the man to get the flashlight's beam on it long enough to get a good look. Brief flashes of color, a random foot or tail before ducking into the darkness again.
He gave chase through the dark, dodging any other traps and tripwires as it hurried towards the creek that ran along the back of his property. Whatever devil this was, it was agile, too.

He reached the creek as he heard a splash and the rustling stopped; he looked around and moved the beam around, it had to be here somewhere...
It was very quiet now, only the sound of the creek running down the slope and the wind rustling the branches. He searched the treetops but saw nothing.
"Damn." He hissed. He'd lost it again.

He marched back towards his cabin, only to find the light inside was off; he never left the light off when he left his cabin, so people might assume he was still there.
He rushed up to the door and flung it open, flipping on the light and looking around for any movement. Once more, it was quiet, but boxes had been overturned, cabinets and chests left open, and drawers fulled out and emptied of their contents. *Someone* had been frantically looking for something.

The old hunter growled, now there were *two devils;* one going off and sending him on a wild goose chase, and one using that distraction to loot his belongings.
He began to collect the items and return them to their proper place, and by the time he was finished, he was somewhat relieved that it appeared that nothing was taken. Whatever they'd been looking for, they hadn't found it.

He'd catch them the next time; it was only a matter of time...

Chapter End Notes

I'll probably change the name of this chapter later... I didn't particularly like this one much but couldn't come up with anything better at the moment.

In other news, the fact that Obsidian is a part of the family and here to stay hit him like a truck and he's still trying to figure out what all that means...

Chapter 13: It's the Little Things That Hurt the Most...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Wachowski family's day had started with phone calls early in the morning. Tom had finally just gotten up to avoid waking anyone else, as several townspeople called with the same, weird, suspicious question: *Had Sonic left the house in the middle of the night to raid their trashcans and garages?*

Tom didn't know what was going on, but Carl's report of another devil was becoming less and less like him just being paranoid and more that a fifth alien was wandering the streets of Green Hills, Montana.

The reports all had similarities to each other: For each person, they were woken up by a commotion at some point in the night by something throwing stuff around outside or in their garage or shed. They would go to investigate, and while some saw nobody, others saw flashes of blue, and everyone that checked their security camera footage was met with the same issue of some sort of electrical shortage to the visual, and when it came back, the creature was gone from view.

Tom kept this to himself until the boys woke up and came downstairs, plopping down at the table and he handed them their plates of scrambled eggs. "Morning, boys..." He hummed.

"Morning, Dad." Tails greeted in his cheery, morning-person tone.

Sonic gave a hum and nod in response, stabbing the eggs with his fork and putting them into his mouth.

"Sonic... You didn't go out for a run last night, did you?"

Sonic looked up from his plate, "...No...?" He murmured with extreme confusion, "Why?"

"Cuz I've had everybody in town calling our house this morning asking if you were getting into their trash."

Sonic frowned, "Dad, you know I haven't gone dumpster-diving since I started living with you guys. Why would I go through other people's trash?"

"I think a better question is 'if it's not you...'" Tails looked curiously to the hedgehog, "...Then *who is it?*"

Maddie arrived with Obsidian in her arms and she pulled a small cup of applesauce out of the cabinet, "Morning, boys." She greeted, and then sat down in the chair, "Okay, Baby. We're gonna try something new today... You were up early, Hon."

"Apparently some new dumpster-diver was getting into people's trash last night and they're calling Dad and blaming *me,*" Sonic muttered, the fork clinking on the glass plate as he

stabbed another piece of his food.

"Careful, or you'll chip the plate!" Tails warned.

"Sorry... I just don't like people questioning my integrity."

Maddie opened the applesauce and offered a tiny spoonful to the infant. Obsidian took it and smacked his lips at the sweet taste, but his eyes were focused more on Knuckles across the table.
Maddie looked at him as well, and her brows furrowed a bit in concern. "Knuckles? You okay, Sweetie?"

Knuckles looked like he was using all of his energy just to stay upright in the chair. He picked up his fork and picked at his eggs, putting a small bit in his mouth, and his head laid in his other hand.

"Knuckles?" Maddie tried again, reaching a hand and putting it on his arm.

The echidna finally looked up at her, "Hmm...? Did you speak, Mother? I'm sorry."

"Are you okay? You don't look so good."

"Mmm." Knuckles mumbled, "I simply did not sleep well last night."

Obsidian frowned, almost glaring at Knuckles.

"You've seemed a little worn out for a couple of days, Big Guy." Tom murmured, "Is there something that's been keeping you from sleeping?"

"Do you want to talk about it?" Maddie asked.

Knuckles poked at his eggs again, "I am fine... Just can't get-"
He cut off as his eyes widened and then he grimaced, dropping his fork to grasp his stomach. "Aah...!"

Maddie started to get up, "Knuckles, are you-"

"I-It is not something to worry-" He clenched his teeth tightly again with a pained grunt.

"Oh, I think it *is*."
Maddie got up from her chair and handed Obsidian to Tails as she walked over to the echidna, putting her hands on the echidna's shoulders. "Have you been in too much pain to sleep? How long has this been going on?"

Knuckles looked back at her, not speaking until another pulse of pain hit him and he grimaced again. "...Several days...!"

"You need to *tell* us these sorts of things, baby... We can't help you if you don't tell us."

"I am a warrior... I am not supposed to be bothered by pain."

Maddie gave him a light smirk, brushing his quills back. "Even warriors need help sometimes... Has this happened before?"

"A few times... Before I arrived here. It came and went, nothing to be concerned over."

"Alright... I'm gonna get you some painkillers, but I want you to let me know if it gets worse, okay?"
She went to the cabinet and then returned with some small pills and a glass of water. "Here you go."

Knuckles nodded slowly, swallowing the pills with small bites of his eggs. "What do you suppose could be wrong?"

"I don't know for certain, but I'd like to avoid taking you into the clinic if I can."

"Why don't we pass on the schoolwork today?" Tom suggested, "You can just focus on getting some sleep and feeling better."

"But if I am resting, who will look after Obsidian while Sonic and Tails are at school?"

Maddie looked at the toddler, "I'll take him with me to the clinic this afternoon. He can sit with Allison at the front desk while I'm tending to patients. You can behave for me, right, Sweetie?"

Obsidian squeaked in response.

"I thought so..."

That tension I'd been getting from Knuckles hadn't been anxiety from our trip to the farmhouse; he'd been *in pain* and trying to hide it from everyone. Did I blame him? Not really.

I was practically an expert at hiding things, at telling the truth but not the whole truth, just enough to get what needed to be done done or to ward off any further questions. Was it something I felt bad about? Sometimes, but what good was a skill if you never used it?

It would appear that I was once again returning to Maddie's clinic, but fortunately, it wasn't for an examination of my own. The air was a little warmer than last time, and my fur had grown thicker since then, so even in the early morning air, I wasn't shivering and trembling as I had before.
We arrived at the clinic and were met with the attendant at the front desk, who grinned as she saw me.

"Well, hello!" She cooed, "How are we today? Not time for his shots yet, right?"

"No. Knuckles is a little under the weather today, so I offered for *you* to watch him up here today."

Allison's eyes lit up, "Oh, I would *love* to! Don't worry, I've got six years of babysitting under my belt in junior high and high school while *also* doing my homework, this'll be *easy!*"

Easy, huh? I *almost* wanted to do something just to prove her *wrong,* but I had a good thing going here, and I didn't wanna ruin it.

Maddie seemed just as amused by the notion as I was, giving the other woman a smirk before handing me off to her. Allison's shirt smelled like the ocean, but I wasn't sure what exactly *about* the scent reminded me of the ocean. I looked at Maddie and she waved to me.

"I'll be right down the hall if you need me, Baby. Be good for Allison, okay?"

Be good? I did not have much experience with that, but I would try.

They took a pet carrier and removed the top, putting a towel and blanket on the bottom for me, and then I was given my ducky and a few other toys to keep me occupied. I played with them for a little bit but then found that it was way more fun to sit there and listen to the animals come in for their appointments and hear their owners explain what was wrong with them.

The first was a cat with a hairball problem, and I got to watch the cat in question barf one up right into the owner's hands without any warning as if the cat felt the need to emphasize its point.
The second, a dog that had somehow gotten a squeaker stuck up its butt and it squeaked every time it barked- which was *a lot* as they waited their turn.

Dogs, cats, birds, rodents, so many animals of shapes and colors and temperaments, and they chose *today* of all days to need help.
The absurdity of the causes for the visit continued on and on, and I just sat there, listening and enjoying the owners' confusion and frustration over their pets' antics and ailments.

Allison barely had time between checking in patients and calling the back to let the doctors know of their presence to even *look* at me, much less really interact with me; I decided it was best to cut her some slack and not make her morning worse.

But honestly, forget golf on television, or Sonic's baseball games... *This was entertainment!*

—

Maddie had been on her lunch hour when her cellphone rang, the caller being their home phone. That was concerning enough, but then when she answered, her heart broke when she heard Knuckles' voice, soft and whimpering, begging her to come to help him.

After making sure that Allison was okay with watching Obsidian for a little bit, she jumped into her car and drove back to the house as fast as she could without concern her husband would pull her over. Honestly, she wasn't that concerned about Tom pulling her over for speeding, he could guess what was happening from the conversation this morning.

When she opened the door, the house was quiet. She didn't think it had been this quiet since before Sonic had moved in with them, and her 'mom senses' were going off as she hurried inside. But then she heard a weak whimper come from the bathroom, and she hurried down the hall towards the door. "Knuckles!?"

She looked into the bathroom and saw Knuckles lying on the floor, his breathing heavy and his body curled up in a fetal position. The phone lay on the floor beside him, dog slobber on it suggesting he had *somehow* convinced Ozzie to bring it to him.
"I-I do not think the medication *helped,* Mother...!" He hissed, shutting his eyes tightly with a pained whine.

"Oh, baby...!" She came over and saw his fur was clumping from sweat, his skin clammy. "Okay, let's get you to the car, okay...? We're gonna figure this out, I promise...!"

Knuckles tried to take in deep breaths as she helped him up onto his feet, letting him hold onto her for support as they limped towards the door. "I-It has never been this severe...!"

"Just hang in there..."
She got him out to the car and up into the passenger seat, buckling him in and then climbing into the driver's seat. Her lunch hour would have to be cut short.

Fortunately, the clinic wasn't that far, and she pulled up to the parking lot and helped him out. He got a few steps before he had to stop, fighting back the urge to puke in the parking lot. "Oh, honey... I'm so sorry...!"

"I-I should have told you before...! It's... My fault...!" He rasped.

"Oh goodness...! That bad, huh?" Allison worried as she saw them come in the front door.

"Uh-huh... Come on, we're gonna get this figured out..."
Knuckles limped alongside her, wandering through the halls until they reached a darker room. "Okay, tell me as best as you can. Is there any certain place where it hurts worse than others?"

Knuckles nodded, "...Lower right...! It-Ah!"
She caught him as he tried to fold up again, "Ergh...! It comes and goes...! A-Almost feels like it's... Like it's moving on its own...! Mother-"
He looked up at her with teary eyes, "...What if it is some form of *parasite*...!?"

"If it is, we'll get rid of it, I promise, but let's not assume that... I'm gonna take an X-Ray, okay?"

"W-What's that...?"

"It's an image that lets me see under the skin, so I can figure out what's wrong. It won't hurt, I promise."
Knuckles nodded and then allowed her to help him up onto the table. "Do the best you can to keep still for a second, okay, Sweetie?"

It took all of Knuckles' concentration and focus to keep from curling up and ruining the photo as another sharp pang hit him, but then it was done, and she took him into another room and helped him lie down on the floor while she examined the photos.

"Hmm... I thought so."

"Have you determined the cause...!?" Knuckles whimpered.

Maddie nodded, coming back over to him. "When you said this had happened before, I got suspicious... You're trying to pass a kidney stone."

"I-I do not recall *consuming* any stones."

"It's not quite like that. Some foods have minerals in them naturally that, if you have a lot of those minerals at one time, can solidify into little rocks. Yours is larger than most I've seen, though, which is why it's so painful."

"C-Can we remove it...!?"

"Yes, but you'll need to make a decision... Do you want to try to hold out a few more days with pain killers for medicine to dissolve some of it, or do you want to undergo a procedure to remove it now? You'll be asleep for it, so you won't feel anything, but I don't want to have to do anything like that if you think you can-"

Knuckles clenched his teeth so hard he was afraid he might break one, tears spilling down his cheeks. "Please...! Just do whatever you need to...!"

Maddie kissed his forehead and grasped his hand tightly. "That's very brave of you, I know you don't like admitting you need help... Sit tight, I'm gonna go let the others know so we can get ready."

Chapter End Notes

I've never had a kidney stone myself, but as the daughter of two parents who have had over 200 stones between them in my lifetime, I know what it's like to witness someone dealing with one. Not fun...

Chapter 14: The 'Fun' Never Ends...

Maddie had called Tom and told him that she'd be home late that night with Knuckles, so the sheriff decided tonight was pizza night. He, Sonic, and Tails took out two pizzas between them, and then drove down to the clinic to pick up Obsidian.

"Do you think Knuckles is okay?" Tails worried as they walked up to the front door, "Mom said that they had to do a procedure."

Sonic's eyes were wide, "What if they had to cut him open...!?"

"I'm sure he's fine," Tom assured the two of them, smiling as they were noticed by the front desk attendant. She hurried over and unlocked the door, letting them inside. "Thanks, Allison."

"No problem." She smiled at each of them, and then walked back over to the front desk and reappeared with Obsidian in her arms. "He's been amazing today, hardly any fuss."

"Thanks for watching him... How's it going back there?"

"Madds said they finished about fifteen minutes ago and are just waiting for him to come back out from under the anesthetic. No complications, but I imagine he'll be sore."

"What happened to him?" Tails asked.

Tom bit his lip, trying to think of a way to explain what they had to do without being too descriptive. "I'll explain it to you some other time, okay? The important thing is that he's going to be fine and the stone's gone."

"He ate a rock?" Sonic shook his head, "That echidna does the weirdest-"

"No no no." Allison giggled, "It's like this."
She grabbed a piece of paper and made a dot on it, "Okay, so sometimes when you eat food with a lot of minerals, those minerals form into a tiny chunk called a kidney stone. Most of them are about the size of this dot here."

Sonic waved a hand in dismissal, "That's *tiny!* Why would *that* hurt?"

"You didn't let me finish, Smartie..."
Allison then grabbed one strand of her hair and held it up against the dot on the paper, "The stone may seem really small, but imagine it having to get pushed through a tube that's as big around as this hair."

Suddenly it all made sense, and the hedgehog grimaced. "...Oh."

"Yeah." Tom informed, "Not fun, trust me. I had one once and it took me out of work for a week until I passed it."

Addison nodded, "Knuckles was having trouble passing his on his own, so your mom removed it so he won't hurt anymore."

"Wait, so it came from his kidneys," Sonic's face went pale, "...and Mom said... *Oh no*."

"Oh no." Tom agreed with a slight smile at his son's horror, "So we'll have to let him rest for a little bit until he heals, okay? No rough-housing."

The two nodded earnestly. "Yes, Sir!"

"Alright, now let's get you guys home. I can imagine Obbie's more than a little tired, and it's almost past your bedtime..."

"We don't have bedtimes."

"Instigated as of tonight."

"*WHAT!?*"

Sonic and Tails took turns taking quick showers before Tom sent them off to bed. It took some convincing since they wanted to be awake when their mom and brother got home, but eventually, Tom made sure that both were nestled in their beds and the lights were out.

Obsidian, on the other hand, refused to settle. He was tired, and cranky, and refused to go to sleep in his bed, so Tom sat in the chair with him, turned on the TV, and watched late-night talk shows on low.

Maddie finally came in the front door, keeping a hand on Knuckles' arm to help him stay steady. "Easy...Easy..."

"Hey, Champ..." Tom murmured softly, "How're you *feeling*...?"

Knuckles looked up at him, eyes weary, but a light smile on his face. "In pain, but I will heal... We were victorious."

Maddie smirked, "Uh-huh." she announced as she held out a small plastic bag.

Tom's eyes widened, "Oh my word, that's a big one."

"You have no idea...!" Knuckles winced as Maddie helped him to lie down on the couch, "I will be taking a victory nap, now that the cause has been dealt with..."

Maddie stroked his head with a hand, "You were *very brave* today... I'm so *proud*."

"Thank you, Mother..."

Tom looked to Obsidian, who had finally zonked out in the chair. "Thank God, he finally went to sleep."

"He was more than likely concerned about my well-being..." Knuckles hummed and then closed his eyes as Maddie put a blanket over him. "Goodnight..."

"Goodnight, Sweetie... Feel better, okay...?"

The two parents wandered upstairs and into their bedroom, closing the door and setting Obsidian down in his cradle before collapsing on the bed. "What a day..." Tom whispered, trying not to wake the infant.

"What a *month*..." Maddie whispered back, "...But we're doing pretty good for getting four kids in the past two years."

"And three of them in the past six months."
Tom sat up and actually climbed up into the bed and under the blanket, "How'd he do?"

"He did really well... He should be good in a few days, but Tom, I was *scared* when I got back here and saw him. He looked so scared and in so much pain...!"

Tom reached out and pulled her closer to him, kissing her cheek. "But you helped him, and he's going to be fine now... Now get out of those dirty scrubs."

Maddie giggled and then grabbed some pajamas from the dresser, "I'm gonna go hose off a bit, be back."

She left the room and headed into the master bathroom, and Tom was left alone with his thoughts.
Maddie's day had been quite eventful, but so had his day. Before Maddie had called and told him about Knuckles, he'd sat down at the station with Wade and gone over several things. The string of trashcan raids was odd, but they also had some calls made to them about the mystery girl Sonic and Tails had encountered earlier. A few more sightings had been made, but mostly, she just came in, bought one or two things from the store, and then wandered back out... And nobody saw where exactly she went after that.

He'd written down what she'd bought at each place, but it seemed pretty normal... A bottle of water here, an orange there... the local church had said they'd seen her take an old blanket from their homeless box.
It was all suggesting what he'd been suspecting; this girl had run away from somewhere and was out here, in a tiny town, all alone, and trying to keep out of sight unless she needed something.
Fortunately, thus far she'd either taken items that were free or she had paid for her items. There hadn't been any theft involved.

He rolled over in the bed and stared blankly at the wall; maybe he'd go out and look for her tomorrow, but right now, he was worn out and needed sleep.

Sonic was running, he was running harder than he ever had in his life.

He was in a dark, twisted wood, tree branches curving up, down, and around each other into a canopy that rarely allowed the moonlight to peek through. Some of them seemed to reach out as he passed and grab onto his arms and ankles.

Shrieking and shouting followed him, they'd found him somehow! How had they found him? He had to get home, he had to protect the others!

He stumbled in the darkness, not even sure where he was going—trees to his left, his right, over and even below him.

He finally broke through the trees, finding a clearing... And the bodies of his family.
"No...No no no-!"

His mom and dad lay facedown in the dirt, arrows in their backs. Tails was dangling from a nearby tree, and Knuckles- Wait, was Knuckles still breathing!? "Knuckles!"
He rushed to the echidna, putting his hands on the deep gashes in his side, "D-Don't worry, I'm here! I'm here now! Please, Knuckles! Please don't die on me!"

"Sonic..."
Knuckles looked at him with teary eyes, "...They...took... Why... didn't... you..."

"No no no!"
Sonic grabbed Knuckles' head in his hands as the echidna's eyes rolled back and he went limp. "No no no! *Please! Please!*"
He grabbed onto him, his quills sparking. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry-"

The shrieks were becoming louder, and Sonic saw that Obsidian was missing. Was that what they took? Had they taken Obsidian from him, *his whole family!?*
He looked back towards the trees as he saw them approaching, dressed in their war attire... The Echidnas. One of them had Longclaw in his grasp, also lifeless and her gaze empty.

He was alone... Because of *them.*

The sparks came harder and stronger, bolts flaring out across his body as his breathing quickened, his heart felt like it was trying to burst out of his chest... and he let out an enraged, sorrowful scream as it exploded into all directions, shattering everything... Leaving nothing but darkness.

A loud boom startled Tails from his sleep, and he sat up with a start. He'd never been a fan of storms, and as he looked around, the attic was plunged into darkness as his nightlight had gone out.

He looked to the window and found it partially open... There was no wind, no rain... But there was also no Sonic.

"Sonic?" He called softly, looking around the attic for his brother. The hedgehog was nowhere to be seen. The fox got up and tugged on the lamp's pull chain; nothing, the power

was out. He went to the window, peering out. There weren't any clouds, either... If there was no storm, then what had made that boom? And why was the power out?

He grabbed a flashlight from Sonic's nightstand and fiddled with the switch until it flickered on, and then he hurried to the door and pushed it open, "D-Dad?" He whimpered, flying down to the floor and then going to his parent's bedroom door. He knocked softly, waiting a moment. "Dad?" He tried a little louder.

After a second, he heard stumbling and the door opened, revealing Maddie. "Tails...? What's the matter, Sweetie...?"

"Mama, the power's out and there's no thunderstorm and Sonic's not in his bed."

Maddie's eyes widened in the flashlight's beam, and she hurried back to the bed, "Tom...!"

There was a sleepy groaning from the bed, and then after a brief whisper, Tails saw his dad sit up. "What?"
Both parents were up and moving, Tom grabbing another flashlight and Maddie scooping up Obsidian from his cradle. "You guys stay in here, I'm going to go look around outside."

He went outside and they hurried into the living room, Maddie sitting down on the floor and pulling Tails into her lap. The battery-powered clock on the wall read five-fifty, so the sun would be rising soon.

"You think he's okay?" Tails worried as he looked out the window and then gasped as he heard moaning coming from the couch.

"Mmm... What is going on...?" Knuckles mumbled.

"Knuckles! You're *home!*"
Tails scrambled over to the couch and wrapped his arms around the echidna, "Are you okay? Did they fix what was hurting you?"

"They did, Fox... Now, what are we all doing sitting in the living room with all of the lights disabled?"

"Power's out," Maddie admitted, "...And Sonic's missing."

The echidna started to sit up, but then winced and laid back down. "*H-How long?*"

"We aren't sure, some time between when we got home and now."

Tails looked to the front door as Tom came back in, "Anything?"

"Nothing other than power's out down the street too." Tom went to the closet and grabbed a coat, "Stay here, I'm gonna drive around the neighborhood and try and figure out how far it goes. We might be able to triangulate where Sonic is from that."

"I-I can help look!" Tails offered.

Tom bent down to the fox, "I need you here to help your mom take care of Knuckles and Obbie, okay? I'll be back in a little bit, okay?"

Tails frowned but nodded slowly. "Okay..."

"Good man-erm...Fox."
He patted Tails' head and then hurried back out the door.

"Sonic..." Tails whimpered, "...Please be okay...!"

Chapter 15: What's Past Has Passed...

The outage fortunately was not as severe as before, only going out a few miles away, and by looking at the outage map, Tom was able to figure out where the center of the circle was... On the edges of the lake.

Sonic wasn't a swimmer, which meant he needed to hurry.

Tom drove down to the docks, putting the truck in park and hurrying out of it to look around the edge of the lake. Sonic would be bright blue in comparison to the grays and browns of the landscape, so he figured he would be able to see him pretty well. He looked out over the area, which was quiet and tranquil for the time being. "Sonic!" He called, looking for any signs of blue. "Sonic!"

He wandered down the slope a little bit, but then he saw something moving in the reeds over by the edge of the water. He heard a soft murmur and then saw blue quills peek out of the grass.
He scrambled down to the edge of the water, not even worrying about getting his feet wet as he saw his middle son lying in a clump of reeds and grass that appeared to have been crushed down, either by him crawling ashore or someone dragging him there. His gloves and shoes were missing, and he was trembling, his fur sticking out in all directions like it had been wet and then dried funny. "Are you okay? What are you *doing* out-"

Sonic's head snapped up and he saw Tom.
"*Dad...!?*" He whimpered, tears staining his face and his eyes red from crying, and the next thing Tom knew, Sonic was in his lap and clinging to his coat for dear life. "Dad! Dad!" He wailed, and Tom immediately knew that answers could wait; Sonic needed comfort right now.

He wrapped his arms tightly around the hedgehog and held onto him, "Shh...It's okay... It's okay...!" He whispered, trying his best to calm the teenager down. "You're alright...! I've got you, whatever happened, it's over now, okay...? Just breathe... You're alright..."

"Don't leave me! Don't leave! Please don't leave!"

"I won't, I promise...! Just take deep breaths, okay...? You're alright...!"
He stroked the hedgehog's head, "Shh...Do you know how you got out here?" The hedgehog shook his head as he shoved his face into Tom's shoulder, "Okay... Okay... Just relax..."

They sat there in the muck and water for several moments, until Sonic's breathing had eased and his body relaxed. "That's it... Are you hurt...?"

Sonic shook his head, "I-I'm sorry-"

"No no no, it's okay... Do you know what happened?"

"You were all... They took you from me...! I-I thought it was *real!* I thought you were- A-And I was-"

"Shh shh shh... You had a nightmare, and then you woke up out here?"
Sonic nodded, "Okay... Okay." He patted the back of Sonic's head, "It was just a nightmare, we're all okay, alright...? It's okay... You wanna go home?"

Sonic nodded, and Tom let go of the hedgehog, shifting his grasp on him to holding his hand, and they walked back up the hill to the road, where Tom helped Sonic up into the truck and then got in on the other side. "Here you go, Bud..." He pulled out a blanket from behind the seats and handed it to Sonic, who wrapped it around his shoulders and arms. The hedgehog sniffled, wiping his nose on the blanket and not speaking.

Knuckles having a kidney stone was not preferable, but not much could be done about that. Sonic possibly sleepwalking and having a nightmare so frightening that he took out the power to half of the town? *That* was something they needed to get to the bottom of...

Sonic didn't talk for the entire ride home and then trudged up the driveway, one foot after the other.

"There we are, Bud..." Tom murmured as he turned the knob.

Maddie had never looked so relieved as when the door opened and her husband came walking in with their son wandering in front of him. "Sonic...!"
She got up from the floor and rushed to Sonic, grasping his arms gently. "Are you okay? Are you hurt, Sweetie?"

Sonic looked up at her with weary eyes and then wrapped his arms around her neck in a tight hug. "No... I'm not okay...!"

"Oh, sweetheart..." Maddie wrapped her arms around him, "It'll be alright, I'm right here... What happened?"

"I think he was sleepwalking," Tom murmured as he bent down and stroked the hedgehog's back, "He mentioned a nightmare..."

Tails hurried over from the table where he'd been eating his cereal and over to his older brother, "You had a nightmare, Sonic?"

Sonic nodded, "...The Echidnas... They..." He shoved his face into his mom's shoulder, "...They killed all of you and took Obbie...! I tried to save you, but-"

"Shh... It was just a dream, Sonic..."

Knuckles grunted as he sat up on the couch, catching Sonic's attention. "...Was I among your attackers?" He wondered.

Sonic shook his head, "...They killed *you too...!* A-And Longclaw, and..."

"I think we need to tell our respective workplaces we will be taking another day off." Tom decided, "We need a day to just recover, to sleep."

They all agreed.

Following the early-morning panic and everything the day before, the Wachowskis all just went back to bed. Even Obsidian seemed to have no trouble returning to his cradle, curling up and sleeping for another couple of hours.

Following a quick shower to rid him of any dirt or bugs in his fur, Tails offered Sonic a place on his bed, and the hedgehog gladly took it, snuggling into his younger brother's warm, comforting embrace. He'd had a rough night, and just being close to his brother seemed to help him fall into a deep, restful sleep.

When he woke up, it was nearly noon, and Tails was sitting up with a book.
"Mmm...Tails...?"

"Hi..." Tails replied with a smile, "I didn't wanna wake you up by leaving until you were ready."

Sonic sat up and rubbed his eyes, "...I wish I knew what happened... I was in bed, and then..." He pulled his knees up to his chin, wrapping his arms around them. "...And then that horrible nightmare."

Tails wrapped his arms around him, "It was just a dream, Sonic. I know they're scary, but that's why we're all here, to help you get through your fears."

Sonic smirked, "...I told you that during the last thunderstorm."

"Uh-huh... Funny how that works."

"Thanks, Tails..."
The pair got up from the bed and wandered downstairs, finding Knuckles off the couch and limping across from the kitchen. "How're you feeling?"

"Quite sore..." Knuckles admitted, holding a steaming hot pocket on a plate. "...But it is only due to the internal damage the stone caused. It will heal and I will be back to my regular training shortly."

"Good. I'm glad you're feeling better."

"And *you?*" Knuckles sat down on the couch again with a wince and then patted for Sonic to take a seat on the couch beside him. "I wish to hear more of this nightmare you suffered."

Sonic sat down beside him, his ears drooping a bit. "I...I don't know if you want to hear it, Knux..."

The echidna nodded firmly, "I do..."

Sonic leaned back on the couch, closing his eyes. He didn't want to remember the details, but they came back to him all the same. "I...I was running through some woods in the dark... I knew that you guys were in trouble and I was trying to get back to you, but... I was too late. Mom and Dad were... Gone... Tails too... And you... You were still alive, but not for much longer... You told me that... That they took something, and I didn't see Obsidian, so I figured it was him, but..."
He paused for a moment, swallowing hard. "...And then the other echidnas appeared... They had Longclaw too...! I was all alone again...! Because they..." He stopped, "I-I'm sorry, I can't-"

"It is alright..." Knuckles put a hand on his shoulder, "...I am sorry that the attack my tribe conducted on you and your guardian has left you so frightened..."

Sonic shook his head, "We didn't know, Knux... We were just two pawns in a war we never asked for." He looked forward, "Sometimes... Sometimes I wonder what my mom, my birth mom... What she looked like... What happened to her... All I remember was Longclaw, and then being here all alone, and..."

"And then having a family again?" Tails offered.

Sonic smiled, pulling the fox up onto the couch with them, "Yeah... Exactly."

"What's past has passed..." Knuckles reminded, "We must instead look to the future, and make a vow to live better than our ancestors did."

"Powerbump!" Tails announced, and they all pounded fists together... Followed by a tiny, fourth fist. "Huh?"

They looked down at Knuckles' lap, finding Obsidian settled there with an excited grin.
"Uh... How long has he been there?" Sonic asked.

Knuckles seemed just as puzzled but in a much more pleasant manner. "I haven't the slightest idea." He announced, scooping the little hedgehog up into his arms and holding him up. "But his powerbumps are just as important!"

Obsidian grinned, and his eyes flickered purple.

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It had been entirely by accident, but I couldn't be happier.

The bolts of electricity that pulsed off of Sonic and Knuckles when they grew angry or stressed were not something I had seen much of in my time as a deity. While most versions of Sonic and Knuckles I had seen did have intense and deep connections to the chaos energies surrounding them, very few of them *radiated* their aura like these two did. Their auras rose to the surface, a frequent reminder that they carried with them a power not many in their world did.

I had wondered at times if this new form *also* bore that strength, but hadn't known exactly how best to test it. Very few things made me angry these days, most of the time I just observed... analyzed, and tried to learn as much about the people I lived with and the town we lived in as I could.
I picked up on their language to where I could understand almost everything that I heard now, I was learning names and places. I could identify some of the various smells in the house and where they came from. Our mother had even been encouraging me to crawl to her a few days before... But surprisingly, I hadn't thought about my old powers in a long time.

Could I still shift my body to other forms? Could I still travel through shadows and send crystals rising from the ground around me? If I was meant to still be able to, was my new body still too underdeveloped to handle it?

There was one thing I'd noticed about that morning; despite clearly being in some distress and agitated when Sonic returned from his... Travels, he hadn't sent out a single pulse of chaos energy. To be honest, his aura when he first came in had felt... drained. What was this about him taking out the power? Had he really disabled the power to town before? I needed to know what happened, but I couldn't ask.

This was what I'd been contemplating as I lay in my cradle and stared at the ceiling... And then I wasn't in my cradle anymore. I was in a dark, misty, incredibly familiar place; the Absence. A place between this shadow and that shadow, a place between the shadows through which I could enter and exit any of them... *Anywhere.* I couldn't help but smile as I saw my own sparks, my purple color, creep across my fur.

I also came to notice that I didn't have any trouble moving on my own. No crawling or walking was needed, I could simply think and float to where I needed to go... And where I needed to go was back to the house.

It took me a moment to sort through it, try to find a shadow within our home, but I found it by listening, focusing until I found Knuckles' voice speaking. When I peeked through, I saw him, Tails, and Sonic all sitting on the couch. I pulled myself out and then reached up as they pounded their fists together.

Sonic and Tails were shocked at my presence, Knuckles looked... Impressed.

And personally... I was pretty impressed with myself too.

Chapter 16: A Snack Break With the Girl from Nowhere

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The days passed by quickly; Knuckles recovered from his ordeal by the second day, making up for lost training time by taking the handle off of a push broom in the garage and using it as a staff, twirling it, and thrusting it at invisible enemies in the backyard. To everyone else, it didn't look like he'd lost any of his edge, but he assured them that he had to make up for the time he spent simply lying around on the couch.

The boys decided not to tell their parents about Obsidian's mysterious teleporting just yet, not sure how they'd handle knowing that their infant could just disappear at any given point.

Sonic didn't have any more sleep-walking episodes, though he had reported that flickers of the nightmare persisted. Those nights, he would wake up and find Tails curled up in his bed with him, arms wrapped around him tightly. Tails' presence certainly seemed to help, and little by little, he began to feel less afraid when the flickers occurred.

Tom sat at his desk at the station, overlooking the reports left by Wade. Only one or two 'trash-terrorizing' incidents in the past few days, and the teenage girl? Only one sighting in a week, when she came into town to buy a small package of gas station donuts and then disappeared again.
But there was a pattern; she was always seen heading towards the north side of town when she left somewhere. Even if nobody knew exactly where she went, it narrowed it down to a general area.

He was pondering how best to use this information when the door opened, and he looked up to find the familiar face of Commander Walters of GUN. The Sheriff sighed, "Well, there goes my good mood."

"I understand your frustrations, Mr. Wachowski, but *you* understood that this was going to happen when we gave you permission to house the aliens."

"Yes, and last I checked you said you'd contact us before you made any *'assessment'* visits to see how things are going."

Commander Walters nodded, "I did, but this is not on a matter of simply *'checking in'* on them... I am here to discuss the outbursts."

Tom raised a brow, "What outbursts?"

Walters stood tall, "This is strictly off-the-record, Mr. Wachowski... But the type of energy expressed by your *'Sonic,'* has been seen and recorded here on Earth *long before* he arrived."

"What do you mean?"

"Following the initial incident with you-know-who... The government opened up some old files. Turns out that for at least fifty years, these random... Bursts of energy have been occurring. We only have records up to fifty years back, but we've also encountered that such bursts might have been happening for far longer than that, close to centuries... I do not believe that Sonic was our first alien from this planet to arrive. I believe they have been coming and going- all over the world- for quite some time."

Tom thought about the creatures Carl had referred to, and the trashcan raids shortly after... "And...if there *are* more out there?"

"Then I would strongly suggest that you and your wife leave them to us. Until we can determine their intent, we cannot keep trying to hide them out here, and the more that are here in your town, the harder it will become to keep this tucked in a drawer."

Tom frowned, but it was like he'd been discussing with Maddie; they couldn't keep taking in strays, they just didn't have the room to tend to them, unless Maddie gave up being a vet and opened an Alien Orphanage in town.

He didn't speak further to the man, instead closing his file and giving a curt nod. "Nice speaking with you, Commander. Have a nice flight back to DC."

"You're not going to try to explain the recent burst here?"

"Nope. Besides,"
He opened the drawer and slipped the files away, "If these have been happening for centuries, what's there to worry about?"

The officer didn't seem pleased with Tom's dismissal of such a serious matter, especially since he apparently wasn't supposed to be telling them any of this.

Tom looked back up at him, folding his hands together. "Commander, look. So far, the only threat from their planet we've had was Knuckles-only *briefly,* mind you- because he was operating with little information and was used by *Robotnik.* So far, the only real threat to our world that has involved them in *any way* has been from *our* species. Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, they don't want to hurt anyone. They're just kids who have all had to grow up without someone to care for them. So yeah, I'm not worried about it... I'm more worried about what *your* guys are up to, to be honest."

Commander Walters nodded slowly, giving thought, and then gave a curt nod. "Very well, but my warning still stands. Stay out of it any further, Mr. Wachowski."

The man then left the office, and Tom leaned back with a sigh of relief. *Thank God, I remembered not to mention Obsidian...!*

That afternoon, once Wade had come in to cover the night shift, Tom headed out with the truck; his destination? The north side of town.

If it had been one time, he might've thought that she'd moved on to another town, but the last sighting had been recent enough that he had a feeling she was still in the area. He followed his usual patrol pattern, driving up the road and heading towards the edge of town and then the surrounding area. He hoped to see something suggesting a runaway living out here; a shelter made out of a strung-up tarp, a random sleeping bag on the side of the road, *something.*

He was approaching the speed trap, that long stretch of road rarely driven and he'd spent many boring afternoons before Sonic revealed himself. He'd sit right there by the sign, waiting, *hoping;* but it was a surprise when someone even *drove* by there, much less actually *speeding*. The only speeder was Sonic, and he couldn't get in trouble before the speed limit was for vehicles- it wasn't considered possible for someone or something to break the speed *on foot.*

Tom was about to pass the sign when he paused. He saw a girl sitting under the **"Welcome to Green Hills"** sign; an unfamiliar girl wearing an army jacket and with dull-blue hair.
Finally, he'd actually *seen* the phantom teenager. He put the truck in park and climbed out, moving towards her slowly, but with purpose. "Excuse me, young lady..."

Tom was relieved when she stayed put instead of running as he'd expected; if she was a runaway, she wouldn't want to get caught by a policeman and sent back to wherever she came from. In fact, she barely even looked up at him. "I'm Sheriff Wachowski, and I just wanted to see if you were alright. The townsfolk had said they'd seen you wandering around a lot."

The girl blinked and then gave a shrug. "I guess..." She mumbled, "...Just... Sitting."

"I see... Are you lost?"

She shook her head, "...Just looking around."

"Looking for anything in particular?"

She shrugged. A grasshopper landed on her head, and she didn't even twitch.

"Well, maybe I can help. That's what I'm here for, is to help people."

Her sullen expression didn't change, but she got up from the grass and onto her feet. "...I don't think anyone can help me anymore... If I'm bothering everyone, I'll just go-"

"Hey, hold on a second."
He placed a hand on her shoulder, stopping her from walking away. "I didn't say you were bothering anyone... You got a name?"

She was quiet, "...Kaia."

"Well, Miss Kaia, do you want to at least get into some clean clothes before you go wandering out again by yourself? Something to eat?"
Kaia didn't speak, but she relaxed. Her head drooped down, and then she gave a little, barely noticeable nod. "Okay... Come on. I'll let you sit in the front seat."

Kaia hesitated when she reached the truck, but then slid into the passenger seat, her hair drooping in her face.

"Seat belt..." Tom reminded, and she pulled the straps over and fiddled with the buckle for a second as if she'd never used one before.
Tom gave her a nod and then they started back towards town. Kaia didn't speak, just fiddled with the loose threads in the stitching of the seat. She paused after a moment, and pulled out a small, blue strand.

"A *quill*..." She whispered.

Tom nodded slowly, Sonic must've shed it on their drive back from the lake and left it behind. "Yeah... It's a quill."

Kaia's eyes looked a little less dull, a little less empty; she spent the rest of the drive holding the quill and running her finger over it. At least she had something to keep her occupied.

There was a small sandwich shop on the edge of town, and while Tom didn't take her hand, he *did* look back from time to time to make sure she was still following. The girl trudged behind, staring at her shoes.
He came to a stop and then pushed the door open to let her go in first. She didn't seem to have a preference, so he got her a simple grilled cheese and a bottle of water. She slumped in the booth in the corner- still fiddling with the quill- and he sat down across from her, not making direct eye contact but instead looking around.

"Are you from around Green Hills?"

"No... Not really."

"Well, could you tell me where you *are* from?"

"Nowhere..."

"*Everybody's* from *somewhere.*"

"Not me... It's not there anymore."

The best Tom could make of this was that she came from a town that had dried up, or perhaps she'd been in a children's home that had shut down. "How long have you *been* from nowhere?"

She didn't respond, but bit her lip and looked down like she wasn't quite sure of the answer. "...Are you going to arrest me, Sheriff?"

Tom shook his head, "Nah... Can't arrest you if you haven't done anything illegal. From what I've heard, you've *paid* for everything you've gotten from the townsfolk here."

She nodded slowly, "Yeah... I find money on the ground or... In old clothes... Not much, but...Enough."

"So you've been walking around all alone for a while?"

She was still, but then gave a nod and took a bite of her sandwich.

"...This thing you're looking around for..."
Tom leaned a little bit across the table, "...Is it a thing, or is it... Something missing in *here?*"
He pointed to her chest with a finger, and her shoulders slumped a little more.

"...Both, I guess... It's hard to explain to a... To someone who hasn't dealt with it."

So perhaps not a runaway, but a kid who'd fallen through the cracks of the system and had been trying to find somewhere that would give her stability. Tom wished he and Maddie could take one more into their home, but there just wasn't room.

"There was a... something happened and..."
She was quiet again, shrugging and taking another bite of her sandwich.

"...You don't have any family that could help you?"

She shook her head, "...They're gone."

"I see..."

Kaia looked out the window, "...If you lost everyone you cared about... What would you do?"

Tom thought for a moment, "Well... I think I would try to keep living and try my best to honor their memories and the things they taught me."

"And... If someone was *responsible* for it...?"

"...I would *still* do that... And hope that one day, I could *forgive* that person for what they did."

Kaia was quiet again, picking up the quill from the table. "...Could... Could I *keep* this?" She asked.

Tom didn't see how it would hurt her to keep one of Sonic's shedded quills; it wasn't like he was *using* it anymore. "Sure thing."

"...Thank you."
She carefully stuck it into her ponytail, and Tom's eyes widened a bit as it sparked with electricity. She looked at him in confusion, "*What?*"

He shook it off as it faded out again, "Nothing, it just... It looks good on you. Alright, finish up here, and then we can get you some clean clothes, huh...?"

Chapter End Notes

Changed the title from 'sneak break' to 'snack break' XD

Chapter 17: Waterworks

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was late afternoon, and Knuckles had spent much of that afternoon practicing in the backyard before retreating to the attic to finish off his book in a well-earned break.
Maddie had come back from work and collected Obsidian, letting him know that she was going to pick up Sonic and Tails from school and then all four of them were going to make a grocery store run, leaving the echidna as the only person home- aside from Ozzie, of course.

Now that he wasn't in pain and misery, the idea of having the house completely to himself was quite pleasant to Knuckles; no Sonic and Tails yelling over video games, no worrying about Obsidian waking up from his nap and crying for someone's attention.

As he finished up the book, it seemed as though the protagonist of the book was also finally getting some peace and quiet, settling back into his hole in the ground after chasing out his meddlesome relatives who were trying to pilfer his belongings in his absence.
If Knuckles had come home to find such things happening to his belongings, he would have been far more aggressive in his removal of said relatives.

He heard the door open downstairs, and then Ozzie barking before a voice hushed him. His mother must be home. He folded the book shut and then took the time to remake his bed briefly before heading downstairs.

Knuckles came around the corner, his book in one hand. "Mother, I have successfully finished the tome of The Hobbit. You said there was *more* to this series?"

He paused as he found not his mom in the kitchen, but a teenage girl in the middle of climbing off the kitchen counter. She paused mid-step, looking over at the echidna with wide eyes.

Knuckles returned her gaze, not sure how best to handle the situation. On one hand, this strange girl was in their kitchen, with no sign that she hadn't just barged in uninvited, but on the other, she may have been welcomed in and the parent responsible had just left the room.

Both of them stared at each other for several tense seconds, and then she looked away with a whine, putting both feet back on the floor and squinting her eyes shut tightly. "Oh no..."

Knuckles was quiet for a moment and then spoke up. "...Hello-"

"Nope." She kept her eyes shut, holding her hand out towards him in a stopping motion. "Nope. *Don't.*"

Knuckles hauled himself up onto the stool across from her, watching as she opened her eyes again and then grabbed a banana from the basket and peeled it, but refused to look back at

him. It was like she was trying to pretend he wasn't there. Was this the same girl Tails and Sonic had seen in the ice cream shop? Had she simply pretended not to see them too?

He looked over as he heard a door open, and then Tom came around the corner and into the kitchen. "Ah, sorry about that, Kaia. He doesn't usually *bark* at people..."
He looked back and forth between Knuckles and the girl, "Ah, great. You two have *met*."

"No, we have not." Knuckles responded, "I believe she is trying to convince herself that I am not here."

Tom smiled and then placed a hand on the girl's shoulder, "I know, it takes some getting used to, and it's a very long story-"

The girl shook her head, "Nah... He's not, don't try to convince me otherwise, okay?"

There was a moment of silence, and Knuckles gave the man a shrug. "...Okay, Kaia. He's not real." Tom lied.

"Thank you."

"But I *am* here." Knuckles responded in confusion, "I have not left the room."

"I know, Knuckles. Don't worry about it."
Kaia then tossed the empty banana peel in the trash can under the island, "Do you feel any better after eating something and having clean clothes?"

"I guess..." She tugged on the oversized sleeve of the sweatshirt she wore, her old, muddy shoes squeaking on the floor as she looked out the window for a moment. "...Do you know where the nearest graves are?"

"Graves? Like a cemetery?"

She nodded slowly, "...I need to dig myself a hole."

Tom sighed and shook his head, "You teenagers and your dramatics..." He mumbled with a light smile, "I just got you some fresh clothes and you want to get them dirty already?"

She looked across the island back at Knuckles again and then shook her head. "I just can't keep doing this...!"

Tom came over and put his hands on her shoulders, "Hey... That offer to help you still stands... You don't have to hold onto it all by yourself."

"I wish you *could* help me... But it's a lost cause. I just have to face it, I just need to stop and-" She looked back at Knuckles and frowned, "Stop *looking* at me like that!"

"Like *what?*"

"Like you... Dah, just forget it." She rubbed her temples, "You're having an argument with a *ghost,* for crying out loud...! Get it together...!"

Tom's brows furrowed, "...You really *do* think he's a hallucination, then."

"They're all *dead,* aren't they?" She closed her eyes as she continued to rub her temples, "The whole tribe wiped themselves out... If one *did* make it here, what would they be doing here in the middle of nowhere?"

Knuckles leaned closer to her, "I came to this planet in search of the Master Emerald-"

Her eyes opened, wide as saucers. The quill in her hair ignited with electricity as her gaze shifted from the island counter to the echidna again, her irises brightening green to an unnatural color for humans.
"*Search...!?*" she hissed, and Knuckles watched the bluish tint in her hair suddenly fade out to gray. "You *lost it*...!? You mean... To tell me you..."

"Kaia!" Tom caught the girl as her eyes then rolled back and she collapsed, but then watched as her skin turned not only gray like her hair but partially translucent, like she was turning into a solid form of gel. "Oh my god-"

And that was what the others found when they walked in the front door.

When Maddie pushed open the door to the house and then turned towards the kitchen to put groceries away, the last thing she had expected was to find her husband lying over an unconscious girl on the floor who was becoming less opaque by the moment. "What the hell!?"

"I-I don't know!" Tom worried, shaking the girl gently in an effort to try to wake her. "Come on, Kaia...! Come on, wake up...!"

"What's happening to her!?"

"I don't know! We were just talking, and then the next second-"

"That's the girl that Sonic and I saw at the shop the other day!" Tails exclaimed. "I'm *sure* of it!"

Sonic looked over the girl, and then he saw one of his quills was in her hair, and pulsing with energy. Every time it sparked, he saw the lightest hint of color return to her, and he got an idea.
"Everyone back up!" He announced and then got down on the floor and his quills sparked. He rubbed his hands together, sparks forming between them, and then he shoved his hands down onto her chest, and the electricity pulsed through the girl's form, but she didn't respond.
"Come on, come on!" He tried again, pulling up a bigger jolt, and then putting his hands on her chest again.

The girl's eyes shot open this time as she gasped, sitting up as she turned back to normal... Mostly. Her eyes had changed to being entirely bright green, aside from her pupils, which

were a glowing white. She held a hand to her chest as she panted, staring blankly for a moment before looking around. "W-What...What happened...?"

"You collapsed and started turning into *water* or somethin'!" Sonic exclaimed, "Are you okay?"

She stared some more, but then she looked at her trembling hands, and her lip started to quiver before she covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

"Hey..."
Maddie bent down and pulled her into her arms, and the girl grabbed tightly to her jacket as she shook and gasped between sobs. "Shh... It's gonna be okay...!"

"They lost it! It's gone!" she sobbed, "No no no no... It's gone! No...!"

"What's gone?" Tails asked.

Knuckles' brows furrowed, "...The Master Emerald. She was trying to convince herself that I was not present, but when I told her what I was doing here on Earth, she got upset and then collapsed."

"It's going to be okay, Kaia..." Tom reassured, "...You're safe here, okay?"
There was a loud clang and the man turned to see the kitchen faucet had burst, spraying water everywhere. "What the-"

Kaia gasped as she saw the water, looking at her hands in horror. Had she caused that? "I-I'm sorry! C-Come on! *S-Stop!* I-!"

"Easy, easy...!" Maddie held her tighter, "Just *breathe,* okay? *Breathe*..."

Nobody was quite sure what was going on, but Maddie held the girl tightly, letting her cry and cry until finally, she started to calm down a bit. Tom went about stopping the water supply, and Tails helped him clean up the mess by grabbing towels from the bathroom. Maddie ran her fingers through the girl's hair, which was staying the bleak, lifeless gray.

"All this time...!" She whispered, "...I thought... If I could just... Just... Just *find* them-"

"Shh..."

"Find *what*...?" Tails asked as he came up closer.

"...My emeralds...! It's all my fault...!"

"Your emeralds...?" Sonic asked.

Kaia nodded, "I-If I hadn't... then they wouldn't have...they wouldn't...!" she slipped into more soft sobs, and Maddie kept her grip on her.

"It's okay... You don't have to tell us everything right now..." she whispered.

"I-I'm sorry...!"

"No...Don't be sorry, you're not doing anything wrong."

"I'm sure you didn't *mean to*," Tom assured, though not sure exactly what she was blaming herself for.

"I was supposed to keep them safe! *I didn't know, I didn't know!*"

"Breathe... Deep breaths in... And out, okay?" Maddie mimicked the action, encouraging the girl to do the same. Her breaths were shaky at first, but slowly, they were easing and becoming longer and easier. "That's it... It's going to be okay..."

Kaia pulled out the quill from her hair, overlooking it as it still crackled with energy. It didn't bother her, in fact, she seemed to be absorbing the energy into herself. "I didn't know making those emeralds would be such a *mistake*..."

"You... *Made* the Chaos Emeralds..." Knuckles murmured.

Kaia's hands plopped down into her lap, trying not to fall into a weeping mess again. "...I had too much power... I needed to put some away, just for a bit...!"

Knuckles seemed in shock, "...*You* are the mighty beast my ancestors spoke of?"

"What are you talking about?" Maddie asked.

Knuckles looked incredibly horrified at this news, and he didn't speak any further.

Maddie loosened her grip on the girl, "Hey..." she whispered, "...Why don't we move to somewhere more comfortable? Would that be okay...?"

Kaia nodded and then allowed Maddie to help her up onto her feet and move into the living room, where they settled on the couch.

Maddie recognized her behavior well, now that she saw her; this girl was extremely depressed, and she had a feeling it had to do with these emeralds going missing. "How long have you been looking for them, Kaia...?" She whispered.

"...I don't know..." she looked at her hands, "...But I haven't... I haven't been myself in a long time..."
She looked to Knuckles, who'd seemed to shrink in size on the floor where he sat. "It all makes sense now, but I'm still furious, and I... I don't know how to cope with it... I'm so tired...!"

"Then why don't you rest, and we'll leave you alone, hmm?" Tom suggested.

Kaia was still for a moment and then nodded. "...Okay..."

Maddie helped Kaia up to her feet and guided her up the stairs. "That's it... You just rest in here for a little bit, okay? I'll bet you haven't slept in a real bed in a while."

Maddie helped her into the bed on Maddie's side, and she found herself stroking the girl's hair out of her face. Kaia almost became invisible as she settled and went back to almost transparency, but she managed a little bit of a smile at the woman. "Thank you..."

Maddie nodded, but after closing the door to the bedroom, she heard a thump and shouts from downstairs. She hurried down the stairs and found Sonic on the floor, his arms and legs tightly wrapped around Knuckles who was struggling and both of them were flickering with blue and red sparks. "What is going-"

"Knuckles tried to bolt," Tom informed firmly.

"*Unhand* me, Hedgehog!" Knuckles shouted, "Or I will-"

"Not until you *calm down.*" Sonic informed, "I know what she said upset you, and I won't let you run off like this!"

Maddie came over to her two eldest, but bent down and took Knuckles' chin in her hand. "Sweetheart... What's the matter...?"

Knuckles looked down, his teeth clenched. "My tribe carried the tale of how they came to possess the Chaos Emeralds, and forged them into the Master Emerald... It was said they faced down a great beast that guarded them, and they defeated it and left with the emeralds...! A great battle, a noble cause...!"
The echidna shut his eyes tightly, "I-I never questioned my tribe's integrity, but now-"

"Hey... I'm sure Kaia doesn't blame you for it."

"Yeah, if she did, she would have attacked you." Tails reassured, "You heard her, too. She blames herself, not you."

"It still does not excuse me-"

"Yes, it *does*!"
Sonic released the echidna, but only so he could turn him around and grab his arms tightly. "You didn't attack me and Longclaw that night, you didn't take the Chaos Emeralds from Kaia, *you* didn't do *any* of that, so don't blame yourself for what your ancestors and other echidnas did! Mom and Dad don't blame themselves for what Robotnik did just because they're the same *species,* right?"

"Right."
Maddie grabbed both of her oldest sons and held them tightly. "You may have attacked Sonic a few months ago, but that was because you had limited information. You didn't get the whole story, and because of that, what happened with Kaia isn't your fault."

Knuckles' eyes were wet, but he quickly wiped them with a glove. "*F-Forgive me...!*"

Maddie moved on to just holding the echidna, "Already have, Sweetie... Even if you feel guilty, I want you to keep telling yourself that it's not your fault, okay?"

"But I remind her of her traumatic experience."

"Same here sometimes," Sonic admitted, "But I still like you, and I don't want you running away to be all brooding and angry in the woods. Hiding never helped anybody, *trust me.*"

"Powerbump!" Tails stepped up with his fist out, "We all made a vow to protect the universe, and we're not going back on it!"

The hedgehog and echidna grinned and pressed their fists together. "Powerbump..." Knuckles hummed.

Chapter End Notes

Y'all's guesses were all great, and I could definitely see where you guys were getting the implications for Kaia being certain people or being involved in certain things, so even though nobody guessed correctly (as of this posting) I am so glad to have such amazing readers who are willing to sit down and analyze the clues to try to find a conclusion.

So Kaia is Chaos... Or rather, Kaia is a character that is an amalgamation of characteristics of both Chaos and Tikal. I will get into more of that in later chapters, but for now, enjoy the reveal!

Chapter 18: Breakfast With a Depressed Droplet

I had never seen a version of Chaos so dull and lifeless. The majority of them were running at full tilt, full of rage, and determined to destroy anything that got in their way. Kaia, on the other hand... She'd been defeated alright, defeated to the point she didn't even want to keep going.

By the time we were all going to bed that night, she had barely twitched from her place on Maddie's side of the bed. The pulses of Chaos Energy I'd felt coming from her had eased, letting me know she was truly asleep and hadn't just collapsed again. Maddie and Tom let her be, pulling sleeping bags out of the closet and opting to have a family sleepover in the living room.

Right now, I was more concerned about Knuckles. He looked like a whole part of him had just been ripped out and torn to shreds, leaving him with the pieces settled in his hands.
I crawled across the floor to him, putting my hands on his arm. "Nuk?"

He looked over at me, blinking once before reaching out with a hand. "Hi, Obsidian..."
I grabbed onto his hand, trying my best to convey my thoughts without words, I had the appearance of a tiny, clueless infant to uphold, after all. He looked back at me and then sighed. "I spent my whole life thinking I came from a noble tribe of warriors, from a family of echidnas who was doing what was right... But now it just sounds like they were thieves and killers...!"

I couldn't argue with his assessment of his ancestors; time and space were vast, and *most* versions of his tribe I'd seen had been led by leaders with corrupted ideals, a lust for power that was insatiable. But I'd *also* seen many versions of *Knuckles,* and most of them were just like *this* one; they were hot-tempered, dedicated to their task, and deep down, they yearned for a home, a family. My Knuckles had found a new family, and now he felt crushed by the actions of his old one.

I patted his leg with my hand, "You... *You*." I whispered.

He looked back at me, a slight smirk on his face. "Look at this... I'm being comforted by an infant who wails whenever his diaper is soiled."
I gave him a grin, and then he picked me up into his arms. "I *have* something for you, I asked Mother to collect it from the market."

He carried me over into the hall and then up into the attic.
I hadn't been granted the full honor of coming into their private space yet, but I barely took the time to look around at everything; I was more interested in what Knuckles had gotten for me.
He opened a large chest, and my eyes widened as I saw what was inside. Although the primary contents of the chest were plastic dart guns and other toys Maddie wouldn't let me touch, there was also a large, green emerald nestled amongst them; the Master Emerald.

One of the greatest artifacts of power in the universe, and they had it hidden in a toy chest. Did Kaia *know* this? Had she known that they were hiding it up here in their sacred sanctum?

But it wasn't the Master Emerald that he was collecting, it was a tiny, foam stick with a rounded triangle on the tip. A spear; a foam, completely *unharmful* spear, but a spear regardless.

"Mother believes you are still too... *Uncoordinated* to be given a *real* weapon, but I believe that you can practice while I train outside. Do you like it?"

My oldest brother had just given me the closest thing to a weapon he could manage; of course, I liked it, *I loved it!*
He hugged his arm tightly, giving him a big smile.

"Aha! I *knew* you had the spirit of a warrior! We will begin proper training, and one day, I will be certain to give you a *true* weapon, and we shall stand guard over our village together!"

Yes... Yes, we would, because if there was one thing I knew for certain, it was that anyone who tried to hurt my family or take me from them was going to face my wrath...!

The boys easily could have just slept in their own beds that night, but they'd decided that it wasn't fair that their parents got to have a slumber party in the living room without them. Within two seconds, Sonic had a full pillow and bedsheet fort set up in the living room, and he probably would have asked to make it movie night as well, but too much had happened today already, and he was in fact the first person to zonk out.

Tom and Maddie took up places on opposite sides of a square, and Tails and Sonic made the other two sides; toes on toes, head on heads. Tails had coordinated it this way after catching the smell of Sonic's feet when he took off his sweaty socks and put on fresh ones.

"Burn 'em! Burn 'em!" Tom teased as he rushed the dirty ones to the laundry room.

Knuckles settled on the couch, and Obsidian was snuggled up in the center of the square, so either Tom or Maddie could easily reach him if he fussed; which he didn't. He was too busy hugging his new toy spear to be upset about *anything.*

Sonic couldn't believe their mom had agreed to buy the infant a toy spear, even when he knew it had been at Knuckles' request.

Ozzie was *quite* confused about why all his people were on the floor, but he got over it easily, plopping down on the other side of Tom and keeping an eye on the household through the night.

By 10 PM, all of them were settled and asleep, and they all remained that way, undisturbed, until about 6 AM when the dog was suddenly barking. Everyone sat up, looking around frantically for the danger, and then they saw Ozzie was barking at Kaia.

The girl was crouched on top of the stair banister like a cat, her eyes glowing that same bright green from under her sweatshirt hood.

Tom quickly got up, realizing what was going on. Ozzie rarely barked unless something got into the house that shouldn't, and Kaia probably didn't *smell right* to him, not being human and all. "Hey hey hey, Ozzie." He hissed, grasping the dog's collar and looking back up at the girl who was somehow balancing. "Sorry about that, Kaia."

Everyone was awake now, so they all rolled over-either with groans or sighs- and climbed out of their sleeping bags. "Good morning..." Maddie greeted, "How're you feeling?"

Kaia let go of the banister with her hands to pull her hood back, and Tom saw some of the blue was back in her hair. "I am... better." She informed, and then jumped as Ozzie barked again. "*Mostly*."

"Is *that* why you were on our counter yesterday?" Knuckles inquired.

She nodded, "Your canine does not care for me, it would seem."

Tom smirked, "Yeah, he's a little protective of his people sometimes... You're okay, just come on down."

Kaia hesitated a moment, and then carefully climbed down from the banister, and that was when Tom noticed her feet. Yesterday, they had been covered by her old sneakers, but now he could see they were sort of like a bird's, with two long toes on the front and one on the back; no wonder she was able to hold onto and balance on the banister so well. They were also still that grayish, semi-translucent substance, which he guessed was her actual form and that the solid teenager form was just a disguise.

"There we go..." Maddie encouraged, holding her hand out. "You hungry?"

She shrugged, "A little..."

"Okay then, let's find you something, hmm?"
She led the girl into the kitchen and then sat her down at the table. "We've got cereal, fruit, yogurt, what sounds good?"

"Fruit is fine, Mrs. Wachowski..."

"Please, call me Maddie."

Sonic rushed up to her, "My name's Sonic, and this is Tails, Knuckles, and Obsidian!"

Tails waved, Knuckles nodded solemnly, and Obsidian just stared at her.

Kaia smiled just a bit, and then pulled the quill out of her hair and held it out. "I guess this is yours, then..."

"Yup! They still spark and glow for a little bit even after I lose one, so that's probably what's causing the sparking."

Kaia shook her head, her smile widening just a little bit. "No... It's *me*." She murmured, and then she tapped the little hedgehog's nose with a finger. The hedgehog shivered, and the sparks danced across his quills for a second.

"Whoa...! That felt weird! How'd you do that?"

"It's a... It's a long story."

Sonic's smile faded a bit as he seemed to remember that she had gone through some rough times and was still working through it. "Right... Okay."

Maddie handed the girl a banana and Kaia began to peel it. As Tom looked, he saw the tips of her fingers were wavering between solid and translucent, like she was struggling to keep this other form up as easily.
"Hey... If you're not comfortable being yourself right now, I understand..." He encouraged, "...but I want you to know that you don't need to feel like you have to hide your true self here."

Kaia looked at him for a second, "You sure?"

"Uh-huh."

She looked at them all for a moment and got nods, and then she gave another smile.
"...Okay..."
It was like a tiny wave washed over the girl's body, wiping away the human attributes and leaving behind something else. Her hair melded together into a series of fins that draped over her shoulders, down her back and one protruding from the back of her head, her fingers became two long ones and a thumb, she grew a little taller, her nose disappeared, and left a smooth, round face, and Tom was pretty sure that he could see her brain floating inside of her head, though it was blurred out enough he didn't even feel weirded out by it.
"You... You are all okay with this?" She asked cautiously.

Maddie smiled, "It's the *real you,* isn't it? So who cares what others think about it?"

"Really...? Wow... Normally people run away screaming about me being a monster or demon..."
Knuckles squirmed in his seat a little, and she clearly noticed it. "...I'm not mad at you, Knuckles, if that's what you're worried about."

The echidna looked up, "You are certain?"

"Of course... I've been awake for a little while, and I was thinking all of it over... I was a mess yesterday, but... I'm not mad at you, I'm mad at those that came *before* you... And mostly *me*." Her head drooped, "...I'm sorry about me ignoring you yesterday, but I've been seeing visions of echidnas for centuries, mocking me and telling me I failed..."

"That's your guilt talking." Tom informed, "Like I said yesterday, Kaia, I'm sure what happened wasn't your fault, and you don't have to share it right now."

"Maybe later..." She mumbled. It was weird, they could see right through the girl, and yet they didn't see any of the banana just... Floating through her body. It just disappeared once it passed her mouth.

"Where does it *go*...?" Sonic asked curiously.

Kaia shrugged, "My kind is just like that. We eat and drink, and then over time depending on our experiences, we evolve into-"

"*Evolve!?*"
Sonic stood up, "You mean like a pokemon!?"

Kaia blinked, "...A what?"

Sonic was too mindblown to properly answer the question, "Tails, we had pokemon on our planet and nobody told me! Wait! Did you guys have different forms depending on your experiences and stats?"

"...Yes?"

Sonic grabbed his head, "We had *Eevees* on our planet, Tails!"

Maddie waved a hand to defuse Kaia's confusion, "Don't worry about it, it's not really important."

Kaia was quiet for another moment, ignoring Sonic's ramblings as she looked thoughtful for a moment. Her brows furrowed and she put her hands onto the sides of her head.

"Something is bothering you," Knuckles surmised.

She looked at him with a frown, "*After* the meal, Echidna... After the meal."

Chapter 19: Learning and Ranting About the Old Days

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They all ate their breakfast and started to get ready for the day, but they were all wondering what was about to happen when it was over. What did Kaia need to say to Knuckles? How could it turn out in the end?

Knuckles left the table almost immediately after finishing his bowl of cereal, and he went to the living room and sat on the floor. Kaia followed and everyone else shortly after, watching the watery being that was settled on the couch.

"Go ahead..." He murmured, "...Say what needs to be said."

Kaia waved her arms a bit as she spoke, though it seemed to be both *to him* and *not to him*, as she wasn't looking at him as she spoke. "*You lost it.* I can't believe you *lost* the Master Emerald. You go through all of that, *all of it!* And then you just... *forget* where it is! Do you have any idea how many *years* I wandered around, following you guys around and trying to just take them back? All of the time I spent just walking and walking and walking, only for me to learn that you probably buried it somewhere to keep it away from everyone else- *myself included!*- and then you just forgot where you buried it!"

"Well," Sonic broke into her rant, "Technically it wasn't that they *forgot* where it *was*, it was more that it was *taken* from them."

The being paused, turning her head to look the hedgehog in the eye. "*...Do tell, little speedster.*"

Sonic grimaced, "Well... So, the Echidnas had the emerald, and then the Owls decided that they weren't worthy of it and stole it from *them*, and *they* buried it somewhere. The Echidnas and the Owls fought for a really long time over that, trying to either keep it hidden or *find* it, and then the Echidnas killed off the last Owl Warrior, my guardian Longclaw, before she told them where it *was*."

"So then Knuckles, the last of the Echidna Tribe, thought that Sonic must have been told where it was," Tails continued, "So he came here to find Sonic, but Sonic wasn't ever *told* about *any* of this, so..."

Kaia looked off into the distance blankly, and then slapped her forehead hard, sending ripples through her body. "You have *got* to be *kidding* me...!"

"I am deeply sorry, Kaia." Knuckles informed, "I was never informed that my tribe's acquisition of the Chaos Emeralds was by dishonorable means. I mean, I was told they were *taken* from you, but I never had any implication it wasn't a *fair* fight!"

Kaia looked up, "A *fair fight...?* There *was* no fight, Knuckles... I never touched your ancestors."
She sat down on the floor, looking thoughtful for a moment. "...My kind was called the Chao... We were a peaceful race, spending our days gathering fruit, swimming in crystal clear water, and smelling the flowers that grew in our valley. *I* was chosen to protect my colony from any sort of dangers, but the *power* that came with that title... It was too much for me to handle at the time, so... I made the Chaos Emeralds to act as power reserves, little boosts if I ever *needed* it."

She dipped her head, "...I didn't know about the Echidna Chieftain's lust for power... I didn't know that by making these power reserves he would... He would try to take them for his *own* gain... I woke up one night sensing something was there, but then I was ambushed... Tied down. I got myself free and ran back to my home as fast as I could, but... I was too late. Most of my colony was killed by the warriors trying to get to the emeralds. I was supposed to *protect* them! And... I couldn't help them when they needed me...!"

Maddie wrapped her arms around the girl, "You did the best you could, it's not your fault. You were outnumbered, right?"

She nodded slowly, "I... I guess... The survivors scattered... Went and found other colonies... I set out to get back what was mine. I would find them, find the emeralds, and then take them back without them knowing. I didn't want to fight them, I just wanted them back... But by the time I tracked them down... They didn't have them anymore, and their energy pulses were... *Wrong*. I don't know how else to explain it, but..."
She sighed, "...I thought they'd just hidden it somewhere knowing I'd come looking for them... I was so *furious!* If you weren't going to use them, then just give them back instead of hiding them from me! I just... I tried to track the energy, and after centuries of walking and looking, it led me here... But this world is so *big*..."

"It is..." Sonic hummed.

Kaia rested her head on her knees, "...One day, a few months ago, I felt the energy pulses surge... And then... I felt that old energy, like someone had *purified* the emeralds of their corruption. The surges led me here to this town, but... I'd decided that this was it. If they weren't here in Green Hills... I was going to just lie down and seep into the soil."

Maddie gently stroked her head fins, "Oh sweetheart... I'm so sorry you had to go through all of that."

"Why did you not simply force my ancestors to tell you what had happened to them?" Knuckles inquired.

Kaia gave a light smile as she shook her head, "Violence and aggression was never the Chao way... And violence returning violence only lends to a cycle of destruction."

Tom smiled, "Truer words were never spoken..."

Sonic looked thoughtfully up at the ceiling, "You said you felt it a few months ago... That was probably when *Eggman* had it."

"And then *you* had them!" Tails exclaimed. "Only... You sent the emeralds away when you were finished." The fox grimaced, "So... We don't know where they are anymore, either...!"

Kaia sighed, "The stones were designed to keep themselves separate unless they were contained within a vessel... So as long as they are apart, they will only pose a small danger to any one person... You must have all seven in order for the *'full effect'*."
Kaia looked to the hedgehog, "You were able to use the emeralds as well?"

"Yeah! Went all golden-god and everything! Eggman did too, but I don't really know why he was green electricity while I was gold sparkles and stuff."

"This... Eggman. What intent did he have when he possessed the emeralds?"

"Total universal domination...!" Sonic motioned for dramatic effect, "To have complete control over the planet, the universe, the multiverse-!"

"*Me.*" Obsidian informed.

Sonic gave the little hedgehog a grin, "Yes, Obbie, you are cute! Anyways, he wanted to take over everything. I was just trying to protect everyone from his giant, forest-fire-starting megabot!"

Kaia nodded, "...Chaos is power... Enriched by the heart."

"Hmm?"

"The power of Chaos is influenced by emotion and intent. The user is a means to unify the chaos... If the user is fueled by negative emotion and thoughts of evil intentions, then a negative, more destructive form of the energy comes to light..." She smiled a bit, "...But in the hands of someone with positive emotion and intent to help and not harm, *a heart of gold shines through.*"

Sonic beamed, "That is the corniest thing I've ever heard, but I'll take it!"

"So I guess *you* were the one Carl saw in the woods and that was digging through the trashcans." Tom murmured, "You were just looking for the Master Emerald."

Kaia sat up a little, "I did encounter the elderly man at the edge of town when he snatched my shoes, yes. I came back to reclaim them and then because he seemed like he was hiding something, I checked his home briefly, but I never touched *anyone's rubbage.*"

"So that only solves *one* mystery..." Maddie hummed, "The Trash-Terror is still out there somewhere."

"Well, one mystery solved is one mystery I don't have to deal with... Wait, but Carl said he saw *two* out there, how did you do that?"

Kaia stood up and then they watched as she left one of her arms behind, separating from her body and then dissolving into a puddle that looked exactly like water, but it didn't soak into the carpet. "I did this... I can only manipulate one part at a time, so I ran into the woods to

lure him away, and then shifted my consciousness into the part I left at the house. The first part went into this dormant state by the creek, looking like water and so he couldn't find it, and then once he was back at his home, I swapped out again and reformed completely once the coast was clear."

"That's so sick...!" Sonic whispered as she reattached her arm.

She smiled a bit, and the blue tint brightened.

Knuckles stood up, "Miss Kaia... I must confess something to you... I have the Master Emerald here with me."

"...What?"

The echidna bowed, "I believed it to be my duty to find and return it to the land of my people... But if it was taken from you, then I must return it to you. It is yours by right."

Kaia was still for a moment, and then she bent down to his level, "Knuckles... The *Master Emerald* was *never* mine... Only the stones held *within* it. If the Chaos Emeralds have been freed and scattered, then the Master Emerald is one of the few things in existence that can keep their power contained and under control... It must be protected, and I think *you* should be the one to do so..."

"You...Are certain?"

"I am..."
The girl stood up again, "Now that I know that the seven are no longer in lustful hands... I think I need some time to... Find *myself* again."

"You're leaving?" Tails worried, "All alone?"

She smiled, "I won't be going far, Little One... If I need any help, I know just the house to come to... Besides," She looked to Obsidian, "*Somebody's* gotta be around to keep this little god from destroying the town when he hits his Terrible Twos."

"What do you mean?" Maddie asked.

Kaia and Obsidian seemed to share a look, "That little hoglet has an incredible level of power lying dormant... Where did you find him?"

"We found him as a newborn all alone in a farmer's barn," Tom replied, "Never saw or heard from his birth mother."

"Hmm... Most intriguing... Still, I don't think he could possibly be in better hands." She stepped back, "Thank you... *All of you,* for helping me out of my slump and providing me with some closure after all this time..."

"You're welcome, Kaia." Maddie replied, "Do visit from time to time."

"I will..."
She then snapped her fingers and disappeared from the room.

"Do you think she'll be okay?" Tails asked.

Tom smiled, "Yeah... I think she will be... Now, we all need to get ourselves ready for the day, hmm? It's almost time for you and Sonic to get to school, so chop chop!"

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And with that, another god had entered the fold and was residing in Green Hills, Montana. It gave me a little bit of comfort knowing Kaia was around, she might be able to relate, to understand my situation; I might be able to talk to her about my experiences and have her take me seriously- assuming I was able to get myself a private audience with her, Tom and Maddie didn't like not knowing where I was.

As I watched my parents leave the house, waving goodbye to me and Knuckles and Tails and Sonic chasing after them with their bags, I couldn't help but think back on the last few weeks.

When I had first come to this world, I was weak, helpless, vulnerable, and most of all... *Afraid.* I was afraid of these people that had taken me into their home, afraid of being able to trust anyone, and afraid of the unknown. I wasn't an all-powerful sun deity anymore, I was just a little, tiny hedgehog at the mercy of these humans and the counterparts of those that tried to destroy me in my previous life.

But then I'd seen how much they cared for each other, how much they cared for *me*. I hadn't wanted to believe it, but then it all had clicked into place, and I found myself... *Wanting* to be near these mortals, wanting to wake up every morning and see their smiling faces and be a part of their lives.

I'd grown up from being small enough to fit in one of their hands to being able to sit up on my own and utter a few words. So much had happened, so much had *changed!*

But that rage still lingered... After all, it wasn't Sonic, Tails, or Knuckles that I had been *truly* angry with, and Maddie and Tom? Never were a part of the previous encounter.

No... Someone else, someone I once *resembled,* was the source of my rage, and if I ever saw him or his counterpart again... I was going to give him the full force of what this tiny infant body had to offer.

Knuckles looked at me with a smirk, "Now then, little warrior... Shall we go outside and train?"

I clutched my tiny spear and gave him a grin. *Yes... We shall*.

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"These human creatures are quite *generous* to leave so much food and supplies out for the less fortunate..."

The little alien held her tiny sack close to her chest as she hopped from boulder to boulder up the slope, her claws digging into the stone to provide a better grip. "We shouldn't need to worry about going hungry here."

She took in a breath of the mountain air, it was so sweet and clear in comparison to what she was used to. The peaks cast deep shadows on the town below, and she could see the stars beginning to fade; sunrise would be spilling over the peaks and into the valley soon, and they needed to be safely nestled in their cave by then.

She stopped as she heard gasping, and she looked back to see her friend was lagging behind, puffing as he tried to climb the rocks. "Oh, dear... I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to outrun you. Should we stop for a moment?"

"N-No... No." He replied with a sniffle, looking up through weary, watery eyes. He held his own bag in his hands, its contents being an assortment of non-food items also left in the bins. "...We can keep going."

"Are you certain?"

He nodded, giving her a smile. "Yeah! All this walking and climbing is *good*... Builds up stamina..."
He then gave a shiver, rubbing his arms to warm himself. "I'm just not used to this cold weather...It's making my nose run."

"Here."
She removed her cloak, wrapping it over his shoulders and closing the clasp. "This'll help."

"But what'll *you* wear?"

She looked down at her tattered dress, barely covering much of anything at this point with the number of burnt holes and her simply outgrowing it.
"Don't worry about me, Silver. That's my job." She gave him a reassuring smile and then took his hand. "Come on, I'll help you the rest of the way. With any luck, we'll be back at the cave before the humans wake up."

Silver smiled, "I *do* like seeing the sunrises here... Do you really think we'll be okay to *stay* here, Blaze? This isn't our world, after all."

Blaze shrugged, "If the humans do not mind the blue hedgehog you pulled out of the lake that morning being around, I do not see why we can't stay here as well." She thought to a few days before, seeing the hedgehog run around the town in a blue streak. Surely he was welcome, why wouldn't they be? Or at least, that was what she hoped; after all... "...*Anything* is better than what we left."

Silver huffed, looking out over the town below them. "Yeah... I guess you're right... Okay, let's go."

Blaze smiled, and then hauled him up onto the next rock. She could help but notice his hands felt a little warmer than usual. She hoped that it was just her own hands being cold from the

stone, and not that he was coming down with a fever...

...The last she needed was to lose her only friend.

Chapter End Notes

This storyline will continue on, I assure you, but I thought this would be a good place to stop while I figure out in what direction the plotline will progress. We will see Obsidian and his shenanigans again soon, but until then, I hope you all enjoyed this first installment!

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